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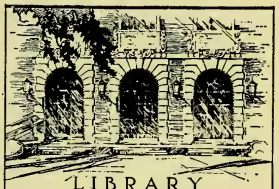
Maggie Hall.

Christmas. 1882.

(E.H.)



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Poor scape-goat of crimes, where,—her part what it may,
So tortured, so hunted to die,
Foul age of deceit and of hate,—on her head
Least stains of gore-guiltiness lie;
To the hearts of the just her blood from the dust
Not in vain for mercy will cry.

Poor scape-goat of nations and faiths in their strife
So cruel,—and thou so fair!
Poor girl!—so, best, in her misery named,—
Discrown'd of two kingdoms, and bare;
Not first nor last on this one was cast
The burden that others should share.

Visions of England, by F. T. PALGRAVE.

UNKNOWN TO HISTORY

A STORY OF THE
CAPTIVITY OF MARY OF SCOTLAND

BY

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

In p. 58 of vol. ii. of the second edition of Miss Strickland's *Life of Mary Queen of Scots*, or p. 100, vol. v. of Burton's *History of Scotland*, will be found the report on which this tale is founded.

If circumstances regarding the Queen's captivity and Babington's plot have been found to be omitted, as well as many interesting personages in the suite of the captive Queen, it must be remembered that the art of the story-teller makes it needful to curtail some of the incidents which would render the narrative too complicated to be interesting to those who wish more for a view of noted characters in remarkable situations, than for a minute and accurate sifting of facts and evidence.

C. M. YONGE.

February 27, 1882.

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

The Little Waif 1

CHAPTER II.

Evil Tidings 17

CHAPTER III.

The Captive 33

CHAPTER IV.

The Oak and the Oaken Hall 46

CHAPTER V.

The Huckstering Woman 61

CHAPTER VI.

The Bewitched Whistle 72

CHAPTER VII.

PAGE

The Blast of the Whistle 81

CHAPTER VIII.

The Key of the Cipher 97

CHAPTER IX.

Unquiet 105

CHAPTER X.

The Lady Arbell 118

CHAPTER XI.

Queen Mary's Presence Chamber 126

CHAPTER XII.

A Furious Letter 141

CHAPTER XIII.

Beads and Bracelets 153

CHAPTER XIV.

The Monograms 165

CHAPTER XV.

Mother and Child 178

CHAPTER XVI.

PAGE
THE PEAK CAVERN 200

CHAPTER XVII.

THE EBBING WELL 222

CHAPTER XVIII.

CIS OR SISTER 243

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CLASH OF SWORDS 256

CHAPTER XX.

WINGFIELD MANOR 274

CHAPTER XXI.

A TANGLE 290

CHAPTER XXII.

TUTBURY 302

UNKNOWN TO HISTORY.

CHAPTER I.

THE LITTLE WAIF.

On a spring day, in the year 1568, Mistress Talbot sat in her lodging at Hull, an upper chamber, with a large latticed window, glazed with the circle and diamond leading perpetuated in Dutch pictures, and opening on a carved balcony, whence, had she been so minded, she could have shaken hands with her opposite neighbour. There was a richly carved mantel-piece, with a sea-coal fire burning in it, for though it was May, the sea winds blew cold, and there was a fishy odour about the town, such as it was well to counteract. The floor was of slippery polished oak, the walls hung with leather, gilded in some places and depending from cornices, whose ornaments proved to an initiated eye, that this had once been the refectory of a small priory, or cell, broken up at the Reformation.

Of furniture there was not much, only an open cupboard, displaying two silver cups and tankards, a sauce-pan of the same metal, a few tall, slender, Venetian glasses, a little pewter, and some rare shells. A few high-backed chairs were ranged against the

wall; there was a tall "armory," *i.e.* a linen-press of dark oak, guarded on each side by the twisted weapons of the sea unicorn, and in the middle of the room stood a large, solid-looking table, adorned with a brown earthenware beau-pot, containing a stiff posy of roses, southernwood, gillyflowers, pinks and pansies, of small dimensions. On hooks, against the wall, hung a pair of spurs, a shield, a breastplate, and other pieces of armour, with an open helmet bearing the dog, the well-known crest of the Talbots of the Shrewsbury line.

On the polished floor, near the window, were a child's cart, a little boat, some whelks and limpets. Their owner, a stout boy of three years old, in a tight, borderless, round cap, and home-spun, madder-dyed frock, lay fast asleep in a big wooden cradle, scarcely large enough, however, to contain him, as he lay curled up, sucking his thumb, and hugging to his breast the soft fragment of a sea-bird's downy breast. If he stirred, his mother's foot was on the rocker, as she sat spinning, but her spindle danced languidly on the floor, as if "feeble was her hand, and silly her thread;" while she listened anxiously for every sound in the street below. She wore a dark blue dress, with a small lace ruff opening in front, deep cuffs to match, and a white apron likewise edged with lace, and a coif, bent down in the centre, over a sweet countenance, matronly, though youthful, and now full of wistful expectancy, not untinged with anxiety and sorrow.

Susan Hardwicke was a distant kinswoman of the famous Bess of Hardwicke, and had formed one of the little court of gentlewomen with whom great ladies were wont to surround themselves. There she met Richard Talbot, the second son of a relative of the Earl of Shrewsbury, a young man who, with the in-

difference of those days to service by land or sea, had been at one time a gentleman pensioner of Queen Mary; at another had sailed under some of the great mariners of the western main. There he had acquired substance enough to make the offer of his hand to the dowerless Susan no great imprudence; and as neither could be a subject for ambitious plans, no obstacle was raised to their wedding.

He took his wife home to his old father's house in the precincts of Sheffield Park, where she was kindly welcomed; but wealth did not so abound in the family but that, when opportunity offered, he was thankful to accept the command of the *Mastiff*, a vessel commissioned by Queen Elizabeth, but built, manned, and maintained at the expense of the Earl of Shrewsbury. It formed part of a small squadron which was cruising on the eastern coast to watch over the intercourse between France and Scotland, whether in the interest of the imprisoned Mary, or of the Lords of the Congregation. He had obtained lodgings for Mistress Susan at Hull, so that he might be with her when he put into harbour, and she was expecting him for the first time since the loss of their second child, a daughter whom he had scarcely seen during her little life of a few months.

Moreover, there had been a sharp storm a few days previously, and experience had not hardened her to the anxieties of a sailor's wife. She had been down once already to the quay, and learnt all that the old sailors could tell her of chances and conjectures; and when her boy began to fret from hunger and weariness, she had left her serving-man, Gervas, to watch for further tidings. Yet, so does one trouble drive out another, that whereas she had a few days ago dreaded

the sorrow of his return, she would now have given worlds to hear his step.

Hark, what is that in the street? Oh, folly! If the *Mastiff* were in, would not Gervas have long ago brought her the tidings? Should she look over the balcony only to be disappointed again? Ah! she had been prudent, for the sounds were dying away. Nay, there was a foot at the door! Gervas with ill news! No, no, it bounded as never did Gervas's step! It was coming up. She started from the chair, quivering with eagerness, as the door opened and in hurried her sun-tanned sailor! She was in his arms in a trance of joy. That was all she knew for a moment, and then, it was as if something else were given back to her. No, it was not a dream! It was substance. In her arms was a little swaddled baby, in her ears its feeble wail, mingled with the glad shout of little Humfrey, as he scrambled from the cradle to be uplifted in his father's arms.

"What is this?" she asked, gazing at the infant between terror and tenderness, as its weak cry and exhausted state forcibly recalled the last hours of her own child.

"It is the only thing we could save from a wreck off the Spurn," said her husband. "Scottish as I take it. The rogues seem to have taken to their boats, leaving behind them a poor woman and her child. I trust they met their deserts and were swamped. We saw the fluttering of her coats as we made for the Humber, and I sent Goatley and Jaques in the boat to see if anything lived. The poor wench was gone before they could lift her up, but the little one cried lustily, though it has waxen weaker since. We had no milk on board, and could only give it bits of soft

bread soaked in beer, and I misdoubt me whether it did not all run out at the corners of its mouth."

This was interspersed with little Humfrey's eager outcries that little sister was come again, and Mrs. Talbot, the tears running down her cheeks, hastened to summon her one woman-servant, Colet, to bring the porringer of milk.

Captain Talbot had only hurried ashore to bring the infant, and show himself to his wife. He was forced instantly to return to the wharf, but he promised to come back as soon as he should have taken order for his men, and for the *Mastiff*, which had suffered considerably in the storm, and would need to be refitted.

Colet hastily put a manchet of fresh bread, a pasty, and a stoup of wine into a basket, and sent it by her husband, Gervas, after their master; and then eagerly assisted her mistress in coaxing the infant to swallow food, and in removing the soaked swaddling clothes which the captain and his crew had not dared to meddle with.

When Captain Talbot returned, as the rays of the setting sun glanced high on the roofs and chimneys, little Humfrey stood peeping through the tracery of the balcony, watching for him, and shrieking with joy at the first glimpse of the sea-bird's feather in his cap. The spotless home-spun cloth and the trenchers were laid for supper, a festive capon was prepared by the choicest skill of Mistress Susan, and the little shipwrecked stranger lay fast asleep in the cradle.

All was well with it now, Mrs. Talbot said. Nothing had ailed it but cold and hunger, and when it had been fed, warmed, and dressed, it had fallen sweetly asleep in her arms, appeasing her heartache for her

own little Sue, while Humfrey fully believed that father had brought his little sister back again.

The child was in truth a girl, apparently three or four months old. She had been rolled up in Mrs. Talbot's baby's clothes, and her own long swaddling bands hung over the back of a chair, where they had been dried before the fire. They were of the finest woollen below, and cambric above, and the outermost were edged with lace, whose quality Mrs. Talbot estimated very highly.

"See," she added, "what we found within. A Popish relic, is it not? Colet and Mistress Gale were for making away with it at once, but it seemed to me that it was a token whereby the poor babe's friends may know her again, if she have any kindred not lost at sea."

The token was a small gold cross, of peculiar workmanship, with a crystal in the middle, through which might be seen some mysterious object neither husband nor wife could make out, but which they agreed must be carefully preserved for the identification of their little waif. Mrs. Talbot also produced a strip of writing which she had found sewn to the inmost band wrapped round the little body, but it had no superscription, and she believed it to be either French, Latin, or High Dutch, for she could make nothing of it. Indeed, the good lady's education had only included reading, writing, needlework and cookery, and she knew no language but her own. Her husband had been taught Latin, but his acquaintance with modern tongues was of the nautical order, and entirely oral and vernacular. However, it enabled him to aver that the letter—if such it were—was neither Scottish, French, Spanish, nor High or Low Dutch. He looked at it in all directions, and shook his head over it.

"Who can read it for us?" asked Mrs. Talbot. "Shall we ask Master Heatherthwayte? he is a scholar, and he said he would look in to see how you fared."

"At supper-time, I trow," said Richard, rather grimly, "the smell of thy stew will bring him down in good time."

"Nay, dear sir, I thought you would be fain to see the good man, and he lives but poorly in his garret."

"Scarce while he hath good wives like thee to boil his pot for him," said Richard, smiling. "Tell me, hath he heard aught of this gear? thou hast not laid this scroll before him?"

"No, Colet brought it to me only now, having found it when washing the swaddling-bands, stitched into one of them."

"Then hark thee, good wife, not one word to him of the writing."

"Might he not interpret it?"

"Not he! I must know more about it ere I let it pass forth from mine hands, or any strange eye fall upon it—Ha, in good time! I hear his step on the stair."

The captain hastily rolled up the scroll and put it into his pouch, while Mistress Susan felt as if she had made a mistake in her hospitality, yet almost as if her husband were unjust towards the good man who had been such a comfort to her in her sorrow; but there was no lack of cordiality or courtesy in Richard's manner when, after a short, quick knock, there entered a figure in hat, cassock, gown, and bands, with a pleasant, though grave countenance, the complexion showing that it had been tanned and sunburnt in early youth, although it wore later traces of a sedentary student life, and, it might be, of less genial living than had nourished the up-growth of that sturdily-built frame.

Master Joseph Heatherthwayte was the greatly underpaid curate of a small parish on the outskirts of Hull. He contrived to live on some £10 per annum in the attic of the house where the Talbots lodged,—and not only to live, but to be full of charitable deeds, mostly at the expense of his own appetite. The square cut of his bands, and the uncompromising roundness of the hat which he doffed on his entrance, marked him as inclined to the Puritan party, which, being that of apparent progress, attracted most of the ardent spirits of the time.

Captain Talbot's inclinations did not lie that way, but he respected and liked his fellow-lodger, and his vexation had been merely the momentary disinclination of a man to be interrupted, especially on his first evening at home. He responded heartily to Master Heatherthwayte's warm pressure of the hand and piously expressed congratulation on his safety, mixed with condolence on the grief that had befallen him.

"And you have been a good friend to my poor wife in her sorrow," said Richard, "for the which I thank you heartily, sir."

"Truly, sir, I could have been her scholar, with such edifying resignation did she submit to the dispensation," returned the clergyman, uttering these long words in a broad northern accent which had nothing incongruous in it to Richard's ears, and taking advantage of the lady's absence on "hospitable tasks intent" to speak in her praise.

Little Humfrey, on his father's knee, comprehending that they were speaking of the recent sorrow, put in his piece of information that "father had brought little sister back from the sea."

"Ah, child!" said Master Heatherthwayte, in the ponderous tone of one unused to children, "thou hast

yet to learn the words of the holy David, 'I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.'"

"Bring not that thought forward, Master Heatherthwayte," said Richard, "I am well pleased that my poor wife and this little lad can take the poor little one as a solace sent them by God, as she assuredly is."

"Mean you, then, to adopt her into your family?" asked the minister.

"We know not if she hath any kin," said Richard, and at that moment Susan entered, followed by the man and maid, each bearing a portion of the meal, which was consumed by the captain and the clergyman as thoroughly hungry men eat; and there was silence till the capon's bones were bare and two large tankards had been filled with Xeres sack, captured in a Spanish ship, "the only good thing that ever came from Spain," quoth the sailor.

Then he began to tell how he had weathered the storm on the Berwickshire coast; but he was interrupted by another knock, followed by the entrance of a small, pale, spare man, with the lightest possible hair, very short, and almost invisible eyebrows; he had a round ruff round his neck, and a black, scholarly gown, belted round his waist with a girdle, in which he carried writing tools.

"Ha, Cuthbert Langston, art thou there?" said the captain, rising. "Thou art kindly welcome. Sit down and crush a cup of sack with Master Heatherthwayte and me."

"Thanks, cousin," returned the visitor, "I heard that the *Mastiff* was come in, and I came to see whether all was well."

"It was kindly done, lad," said Richard, while the others did their part of the welcome, though scarcely

so willingly. Cuthbert Langston was a distant relation on the mother's side of Richard, a young scholar who, after his education at Oxford, had gone abroad with a nobleman's son as his pupil, and on his return, instead of taking Holy Orders, as was expected, had obtained employment in a merchant's counting-house at Hull, for which his knowledge of languages eminently fitted him. Though he possessed none of the noble blood of the Talbots, the employment was thought by Mistress Susan somewhat derogatory to the family dignity, and there was a strong suspicion both in her mind and that of Master Heatherthwayte that his change of purpose was due to the change of religion in England, although he was a perfectly regular church-goer. Captain Talbot, however, laughed at all this, and, though he had not much in common with his kinsman, always treated him in a cousinly fashion. He too had heard a rumour of the foundling, and made inquiry for it, upon which Richard told his story in greater detail, and his wife asked what the poor mother was like.

"I saw her not," he answered, "but Goatley thought the poor woman to whom she was bound more like to be nurse than mother, judging by her years and her garments."

"The mother may have been washed off before," said Susan, lifting the little one from the cradle, and hushing it. "Weep not, poor babe, thou hast found a mother here."

"Saw you no sign of the crew?" asked Master Heatherthwayte.

"None at all. The vessel I knew of old as the brig *Bride of Dunbar*, one of the craft that ply between Dunbar and the French ports."

"And how think you? Were none like to be saved?"

"I mean to ride along the coast to-morrow, to see

whether aught can be heard of them, but even if their boats could live in such a sea, they would have evil hap among the wreckers if they came ashore. I would not desire to be a shipwrecked man in these parts, and if I had a Scottish or a French tongue in my head so much the worse for me."

"Ah, Master Heatherthwayte," said Susan, "should not a man give up the sea when he is a husband and father?"

"Tush, dame! With God's blessing the good ship *Mastiff* will ride out many another such gale. Tell thy mother, little Numpy, that an English sailor is worth a dozen French or Scottish lubbers."

"Sir," said Master Heatherthwayte, "the pious trust of the former part of your discourse is contradicted by the boast of the latter end."

"Nay, Sir Minister, what doth a sailor put his trust in but his God foremost, and then his good ship and his brave men?"

It should be observed that all the three men wore their hats, and each made a reverent gesture of touching them. The clergyman seemed satisfied by the answer, and presently added that it would be well, if Master and Mistress Talbot meant to adopt the child, that she should be baptized.

"How now?" said Richard, "we are not so near any coast of Turks or Infidels that we should deem her sprung of heathen folk."

"Assuredly not," said Cuthbert Langston, whose quick, light-coloured eyes had spied the reliquary in Mistress Susan's work-basket, "if this belongs to her. By your leave, kinswoman," and he lifted it in his hand with evident veneration, and began examining it.

"It is Babylonish gold, an accursed thing!" ex-

claimed Master Heatherthwayte. "Beware, Master Talbot, and cast it from thee."

"Nay," said Richard, "that shall I not do. It may lead to the discovery of the child's kindred. Why, my master, what harm think you it will do to us in my dame's casket? Or what right have we to make away with the little one's property?"

His common sense was equally far removed from the horror of the one visitor as from the reverence of the other, and so it pleased neither Master Langston was the first to speak, observing that the relic made it evident that the child must have been baptized.

"A Popish baptism," said Master Heatherthwayte, "with chrism and taper and words and gestures to destroy the pure simplicity of the sacrament."

Controversy here seemed to be setting in, and the infant cause of it here setting up a cry, Susan escaped under pretext of putting Humfrey to bed in the next room, and carried off both the little ones. The conversation then fell upon the voyage, and the captain described the impregnable aspect of the castle of Dumbarton, which was held for Queen Mary by her faithful partisan, Lord Flemyng. On this, Cuthbert Langston asked whether he had heard any tidings of the imprisoned Queen, and he answered that it was reported at Leith that she had well-nigh escaped from Lochleven, in the disguise of a lavender or washerwoman. She was actually in the boat, and about to cross the lake, when a rude oarsman attempted to pull aside her muffler, and the whiteness of the hand she raised in self-protection betrayed her, so that she was carried back. "If she had reached Dumbarton," he said, "she might have mocked at the Lords of the Congregation. Nay, she might have been in that very brig, whose wreck I beheld."

"And well would it have been for Scotland and England had it been the will of Heaven that so it should fall out," observed the Puritan.

"Or it may be," said the merchant, "that the poor lady's escape was frustrated by Providence, that she might be saved from the rocks of the Spurn."

"The poor lady, truly! Say rather the murtheress," quoth Heatherthwayte.

"Say rather the victim and scapegoat of other men's plots," protested Langston.

"Come, come, sirs," says Talbot, "we'll have no high words here on what Heaven only knoweth. Poor lady she is, in all sooth, if sackless; poorer still if guilty; so I know not what matter there is for falling out about. In any sort, I will not have it at my table." He spoke with the authority of the captain of a ship, and the two visitors, scarce knowing it, submitted to his decision of manner, but the harmony of the evening seemed ended. Cuthbert Langston soon rose to bid good-night, first asking his cousin at what hour he proposed to set forth for the Spurn, to which Richard briefly replied that it depended on what had to be done as to the repairs of the ship.

The clergyman tarried behind him to say, "Master Talbot, I marvel that so godly a man as you have ever been should be willing to harbour one so popishly affected, and whom many suspect of being a seminary priest."

"Master Heatherthwayte," returned the captain, "my kinsman is my kinsman, and my house is my house. No offence, sir, but I brook not meddling."

The clergyman protested that no offence was intended, only caution, and betook himself to his own bare chamber, high above. No sooner was he gone than Captain Talbot again became absorbed in the

endeavour to spell out the mystery of the scroll, with his elbows on the table and his hands over his ears, nor did he look up till he was touched by his wife, when he uttered an impatient demand what she wanted now.

She had the little waif in her arms undressed, and with only a woollen coverlet loosely wrapped round her, and without speaking she pointed to the little shoulder-blades, where two marks had been indelibly made—on one side the crowned monogram of the Blessed Virgin, on the other a device like the Labarum, only that the upright was surmounted by a *fleur-de-lis*.

Richard Talbot gave a sort of perplexed grunt of annoyance to acknowledge that he saw them.

"Poor little maid! how could they be so cruel? They have been branded with a hot iron," said the lady.

"They that parted from her meant to know her again," returned Talbot.

"Surely they are Popish marks," added Mistress Susan.

"Look you here, Dame Sue, I know you for a dis-

creet woman. Keep this gear to yourself, both the letter and the marks. Who hath seen them?"

"I doubt me whether even Colet has seen this mark."

"That is well. Keep all out of sight. Many a man has been brought into trouble for a less matter swelled by prating tongues."

"Have you made it out?"

"Not I. It may be only the child's horoscope, or some old wife's charm that is here sewn up, and these marks may be naught but some sailor's freak; but, on the other hand, they may be concerned with perilous matter, so the less said the better."

"Should they not be shown to my lord, or to her Grace's Council?"

"I'm not going to run my head into trouble for making a coil about what may be naught. That's what befell honest Mark Walton. He thought he had seized matter of State, and went up to Master Walsingham, swelling like an Indian turkey-cock, with his secret letters, and behold they turned out to be a Dutch fish-wife's charm to bring the herrings. I can tell you he has rued the work he made about it ever since. On the other hand, let it get abroad through yonder prating fellow, Heatherthwayte, or any other, that Master Richard Talbot had in his house a child with, I know not what Popish tokens, and a scroll in an unknown tongue, and I should be had up in gyves for suspicion of treason, or may be harbouring the Prince of Scotland himself, when it is only some poor Scottish archer's babe."

"You would not have me part with the poor little one?"

"Am I a Turk or a Pagan? No. Only hold thy peace, as I shall hold mine, until such time as I can meet some one whom I can trust to read this riddle.

Tell me—what like is the child? Wouldst guess it to be of gentle, or of clownish blood, if women can tell such things?"

"Of gentle blood, assuredly," cried the lady, so that he smiled and said, "I might have known that so thou wouldst answer."

"Nay, but see her little hands and fingers, and the mould of her dainty limbs. No Scottish fisher clown was her father, I dare be sworn. Her skin is as fair and fine as my Humfrey's, and moreover she has always been in hands that knew how a babe should be tended. Any woman can tell you that!"

"And what like is she in your woman's eyes? What complexion doth she promise?"

"Her hair, what she has of it, is dark; her eyes—bless them—are of a deep blue, or purple, such as most babes have till they take their true tint. There is no guessing. Humfrey's eyes were once like to be brown, now are they as blue as thine own."

"I understand all that," said Captain Talbot, smiling. "If she have kindred, they will know her better by the sign manual on her tender flesh than by her face."

"And who are they?"

"Who are they?" echoed the captain, rolling up the scroll in despair. "Here, take it, Susan, and keep it safe from all eyes. Whatever it may be, it may serve thereafter to prove her true name. And above all, not a word or breath to Heatherthwayte, or any of thy gossips, wear they coif or bands."

"Ah, sir! that you will mistrust the good man."

"I said not I mistrust any one; only that I will have no word of all this go forth! Not one! Thou heedest me, wife?"

"Verily I do, sir; I will be mute."

CHAPTER II.

EVIL TIDINGS.

After giving orders for the repairs of the *Mastiff*, and the disposal of her crew, Master Richard Talbot purveyed himself of a horse at the hostel, and set forth for Spurn Head to make inquiries along the coast respecting the wreck of the *Bride of Dunbar*, and he was joined by Cuthbert Langston, who said his house had had dealings with her owners, and that he must ascertain the fate of her wares. His good lady remained in charge of the mysterious little waif, over whom her tender heart yearned more and more, while her little boy hovered about in serene contemplation of the treasure he thought he had recovered. To him the babe seemed really his little sister; to his mother, if she sometimes awakened pangs of keen regret, yet she filled up much of the dreary void of the last few weeks.

Mrs. Talbot was a quiet, reserved woman, not prone to gadding abroad, and she had made few acquaintances during her sojourn at Hull; but every creature she knew, or might have known, seemed to her to drop in that day, and bring at least two friends to inspect the orphan of the wreck, and demand all particulars.

The little girl was clad in the swaddling garments of Mrs. Talbot's own children, and the mysterious

marks were suspected by no one, far less the letter which Susan, for security's sake, had locked up in her nearly empty, steel-bound, money casket. The opinions of the gossips varied, some thinking the babe might belong to some of the Queen of Scotland's party fleeing to France, others fathering her on the refugees from the persecutions in Flanders, a third party believing her a mere fisherman's child, and one lean, lantern-jawed old crone, Mistress Rotherford, observing, "Take my word, Mrs. Talbot, and keep her not with you. They that are cast up by the sea never bring good with them."

The court of female inquiry was still sitting when a heavy tread was heard, and Colet announced "a serving-man from Bridgefield had ridden post haste to speak with madam," and the messenger, booted and spurred, with the mastiff badge on his sleeve, and the hat he held in his hand, followed closely.

"What news, Nathanael?" she asked, as she responded to his greeting.

"Ill enough news, mistress," was the answer. "Master Richard's ship be in, they tell me."

"Yea, but he is rid out to make inquiry for a wreck," said the lady. "Is all well with my good father-in-law?"

"He ails less in body than in mind, so please you. Being that Master Humfrey was thrown by Blackfoot, the beast being scared by a flash of lightning, and never spoke again."

"Master Humfrey!"

"Ay, mistress. Pitched on his head against the south gate-post. I saw how it was with him when we took him up, and he never so much as lifted an eyelid, but died at the turn of the night. Heaven rest his soul!"

"Heaven rest his soul!" echoed Susan, and the ladies around chimed in. They had come for one excitement, and here was another.

"There! See but what I said!" quoth Mrs. Rotherford, uplifting a skinny finger to emphasise that the poor little flotsome had already brought evil.

"Nay," said the portly wife of a merchant, "begging your pardon, this may be a fat instead of a lean sorrow. Leaves the poor gentleman heirs, Mrs. Talbot?"

"Oh no!" said Susan, with tears in her eyes. "His wife died two years back, and her chrisom babe with her. He loved her too well to turn his mind to wed again, and now he is with her for aye." And she covered her face and sobbed, regardless of the congratulations of the merchant's wife, and exclaiming, "Oh! the poor old lady!"

"In sooth, mistress," said Nathanael, who had stood all this time as if he had by no means emptied his budget of ill news, "poor old madam fell down all of a heap on the floor, and when the wenches lifted her, they found she was stricken with the dead palsy, and she has not spoken, and there's no one knows what to do, for the poor old squire is like one distraught, sitting by her bed like an image on a monument, with the tears flowing down his old cheeks. 'But,' says he to me, 'get you to Hull, Nat, and take madam's palfrey and a couple of sumpter beasts, and bring my good daughter Talbot back with you as fast as she and the babes may brook.' I made bold to say, 'And Master Richard, your worship?' then he groaned somewhat, and said, 'If my son's ship be come in, he must do as her Grace's service permits, but meantime he must spare us his wife, for she is sorely needed here.' And he looked at the bed so as it would break

your heart to see, for since old Nurse Tooke hath been doited, there's not been a wench about the house that can do a hand's turn for a sick body."

Susan knew this was true, for her mother-in-law had been one of those bustling, managing housewives, who prefer doing everything themselves to training others, and she was appalled at the idea of the probable desolation and helplessness of the bereaved household.

It was far too late to start that day, even had her husband been at home, for the horses sent for her had to rest. The visitors would fain have extracted some more particulars about the old squire's age, his kindred to the great Earl, and the amount of estate to which her husband had become heir. There were those among them who could not understand Susan's genuine grief, and there were others whose consolations were no less distressing to one of her reserved character. She made brief answer that the squire was threescore and fifteen years old, his wife nigh about his age; that her husband was now their only child; that he was descended from a son of the great Earl John, killed at the Bridge of Chatillon; that he held the estate of Bridgefield in fief on tenure of military service to the head of his family. She did not know how much it was worth by the year, but she must pray the good ladies to excuse her, as she had many preparations to make. Volunteers to assist her in packing her mails were made, but she declined them all, and rejoiced when left alone with Colet to arrange for what would be probably her final departure from Hull.

It was a blow to find that she must part from her servant-woman, who, as well as her husband Gervas, was a native of Hull. Not only were they both unwilling

to leave, but the inland country was to their imagination a wild unexplored desert. Indeed, Colet had only entered Mrs. Talbot's service to supply the place of a maid who had sickened with fever and ague, and had to be sent back to her native Hallamshire.

Ere long Mr. Heatherthwayte came down to offer his consolation, and still more his advice, that the little foundling should be at once baptized—conditionally, if the lady preferred it.

The Reformed of imperfect theological training, and as such Joseph Heatherthwayte must be classed, were apt to view the ceremonial of the old baptismal form, symbolical and beautiful as it was, as almost destroying the efficacy of the rite. Moreover, there was a further impression that the Church by which the child was baptized, had a right to bring it up, and thus the clergyman was urgent with the lady that she should seize this opportunity for the little one's baptism.

"Not without my husband's consent and knowledge," she said resolutely.

"Master Talbot is a good man, but somewhat careless of sound doctrine, as be the most of seafaring men."

Susan had been a little nettled by her husband's implied belief that she was influenced by the minister, so there was double resolution, as well as some offence in her reply, that she knew her duty as a wife too well to consent to such a thing without him. As to his being careless, he was a true and God-fearing man, and Mr. Heatherthwayte should know better than to speak thus of him to his wife.

Mr. Heatherthwayte's real piety and goodness had made him a great comfort to Susan in her lonely grief, but he had not the delicate tact of gentle blood, and

had not known where to stop, and as he stood half apologising and half exhorting, she felt that her Richard was quite right, and that he could be both meddling and presuming. He was exceedingly in the way of her packing too, and she was at her wit's end to get rid of him, when suddenly Humfrey managed to pinch his fingers in a box, and set up such a yell, as, seconded by the frightened baby, was more than any masculine ears could endure, and drove Master Heatherthwayte to beat a retreat.

Mistress Susan was well on in her work when her husband returned, and as she expected, was greatly overcome by the tidings of his brother's death. He closely questioned Nathanael on every detail, and could think of nothing but the happy days he had shared with his brother, and of the grief of his parents. He approved of all that his wife had done; and as the damage sustained by the *Mastiff* could not be repaired under a month, he had no doubt about leaving his crew in the charge of his lieutenant while he took his family home.

So busy were both, and so full of needful cares, the one in giving up her lodging, the other in leaving his men, that it was impossible to inquire into the result of his researches, for the captain was in that mood of suppressed grief and vehement haste in which irrelevant inquiry is perfectly unbearable.

It was not till late in the evening that Richard told his wife of his want of success in his investigations. He had found witnesses of the destruction of the ship, but he did not give them full credit. "The fellows say the ship drove on the rock, and that they saw her boats go down with every soul on board, and that they would not lie to an officer of her Grace.

Heaven pardon me if I do them injustice in believing they would lie to him sooner than to any one else. They are rogues enough to take good care that no poor wretch should survive even if he did chance to come to land."

"Then if there be no one to claim her, we may bring up as our own the sweet babe whom Heaven hath sent us."

"Not so fast, dame. Thou wert wont to be more discreet. I said not so, but for the nonce, till I can come by the rights of that scroll, there's no need to make a coil. Let no one know of it, or of the trinket —Thou hast them safe?"

"Laid up with the Indian gold chain, thy wedding gift, dear sir."

"'Tis well. My mother!—ah me," he added, catching himself up; "little like is she to ask questions, poor soul."

Then Susan diffidently told of Master Heatherthwayte's earnest wish to christen the child, and, what certainly biassed her a good deal, the suggestion that this would secure her to their own religion.

"There is something in that," said Richard, "specially after what Cuthbert said as to the golden toy yonder. If times changed again—which Heaven forfend—that fellow might give us trouble about the matter."

"You doubt him then, sir!" she asked.

"I relished not his ways on our ride to-day," said Richard. "Sure I am that he had some secret cause for being so curious about the wreck. I suspect him of some secret commerce with the Queen of Scots' folk."

"Yet you were on his side against Mr. Heatherthwayte," said Susan.

"I would not have my kinsman browbeaten at mine own table by the self-conceited son of a dalesman, even if he have got a round hat and Geneva band! Ah, well! one good thing is we shall leave both of them well behind us, though I would it were for another cause."

Something in the remonstrance had, however, so worked on Richard Talbot, that before morning he declared that, hap what hap, if he and his wife were to bring up the child, she should be made a good Protestant Christian before they left the house, and there should be no more ado about it.

It was altogether illogical and untheological; but Master Heatherthwayte was delighted when in the very early morning his devotions were interrupted, and he was summoned by the captain himself to christen the child.

Richard and his wife were sponsors, but the question of name had never occurred to any one. However, in the pause of perplexity, when the response lagged to "Name this child," little Humfrey, a delighted spectator, broke out again with "Little Sis."

And forthwith, "Cicely, if thou art not already baptized," was uttered over the child, and Cicely became her name. It cost Susan a pang, as it had been that of her own little daughter, but it was too late to object, and she uttered no regret, but took the child to her heart, as sent instead of her who had been taken from her.

Master Heatherthwayte bade them good speed, and Master Langston stood at the door of his office and waved them a farewell, both alike unconscious of the rejoicing with which they were left behind. Mistress Talbot rode on the palfrey sent for her use, with the

little stranger slung to her neck for security's sake. Her boy rode "a cock-horse" before his father, but a resting-place was provided for him on a sort of pannier on one of the sumpter beasts. What these animals could not carry of the household stuff was left in Colet's charge to be despatched by carriers; and the travellers jogged slowly on through deep Yorkshire lanes, often halting to refresh the horses and supply the wants of the little children at homely wayside inns, their entrance usually garnished with an archway formed of the jawbones of whales, which often served for gate-posts in that eastern part of Yorkshire. And thus they journeyed, with frequent halts, until they came to the Derbyshire borders.

Bridgefield House stood on the top of a steep slope leading to the river Dun, with a high arched bridge and a mill below it. From the bridge proceeded one of the magnificent avenues of oak-trees which led up to the lordly lodge, full four miles off, right across Sheffield Park.

The Bridgefield estate had been a younger son's portion, and its owners had always been regarded as gentlemen retainers of the head of their name, the Earl of Shrewsbury. Tudor jealousy had forbidden the marshalling of such a *meiné* as the old feudal lords had loved to assemble, and each generation of the Bridgefield Talbots had become more independent than the former one. The father had spent his younger days as esquire to the late Earl, but had since become a justice of the peace, and took rank with the substantial landowners of the country. Humfrey, his eldest son, had been a gentleman pensioner of the Queen till his marriage, and Richard, though beginning his career as page to the present Earl's first wife, had likewise

entered the service of her Majesty, though still it was understood that the head of their name had a claim to their immediate service, and had he been called to take up arms, they would have been the first to follow his banner. Indeed, a pair of spurs was all the annual rent they paid for their estate, which they held on this tenure, as well as on paying the heriard horse on the death of the head of the family, and other contributions to their lord's splendour when he knighted his son or married his daughter. In fact, they stood on the borderland of that feudal retainership which was being rapidly extinguished. The estate, carved out of the great Sheffield property, was sufficient to maintain the owner in the dignities of an English gentleman, and to portion off the daughters, provided that the superfluous sons shifted for themselves, as Richard had hitherto done. The house had been ruined in the time of the Wars of the Roses, and rebuilt in the later fashion, with a friendly-looking front, containing two large windows, and a porch projecting between them. The hall reached to the top of the house, and had a waggon ceiling, with mastiffs alternating with roses on portcullises at the intersections of the timbers. This was the family sitting and dining room, and had a huge chimney never devoid of a wood fire. One end had a buttery-hatch communicating with the kitchen and offices; at the other was a small room, sacred to the master of the house, niched under the broad staircase that led to the upper rooms, which opened on a gallery running round three sides of the hall.

Outside, on the southern side of the house, was a garden of potherbs, with the green walks edged by a few bright flowers for beau-pots and posies. This had

stone walls separating it from the paddock, which sloped down to the river, and was a good deal broken by ivy-covered rocks. Adjoining the stables were farm-buildings and barns, for there were several fields for tillage along the river-side, and the mill and two more farms were the property of the Bridgefield squire, so that the inheritance was a very fair one, wedged in, as it were, between the river and the great Chase of Sheffield, up whose stately avenue the riding party looked as they crossed the bridge, Richard having become more silent than ever as he came among the familiar rocks and trees of his boyhood, and knew he should not meet that hearty welcome from his brother which had never hitherto failed to greet his return. The house had that strange air of forlornness which seems to proclaim sorrow within. The great court doors stood open, and a big, rough deer-hound, at the sound of the approaching hoofs, rose slowly up, and began a series of long, deep-mouthed barks, with pauses between, sounding like a knell. One or two men and maids ran out at the sound, and as the travellers rode up to the horse-block, an old gray-bearded serving-man came stumbling forth with "Oh! Master Diccon, woe worth the day!"

"How does my mother?" asked Richard, as he sprang off and set his boy on his feet.

"No worse, sir, but she hath not yet spoken a word —back, Thunder—ah! sir, the poor dog knows you."

For the great hound had sprung up to Richard in eager greeting, but then, as soon as he heard his voice, the creature drooped his ears and tail, and instead of continuing his demonstrations of joy, stood quietly by, only now and then poking his long, rough nose into Richard's hand, knowing as well as possible that

though not his dear lost master, he was the next thing!

Mistress Susan and the infant were lifted down—a hurried question and answer assured them that the funeral was over yesterday. My Lady Countess had come down and would have it so; my lord was at Court, and Sir Gilbert and his brothers had been present, but the old servants thought it hard that none nearer in blood should be there to lay their young squire in his grave, nor to support his father, who, poor old man, had tottered, and been so like to swoon as he passed the hall door, that Sir Gilbert and old Diggory could but help him back again, fearing lest he, too, might have a stroke.

It was a great grief to Richard, who had longed to look on his brother's face again, but he could say nothing, only he gave one hand to his wife and the other to his son, and led them into the hall, which was in an indescribable state of confusion. The trestles which had supported the coffin were still at one end of the room, the long tables were still covered with cloths, trenchers, knives, cups, and the remains of the funeral baked meats, and there were overthrown tankards and stains of wine on the cloth, as though, whatever else were lacking, the Talbot retainers had not missed their revel.

One of the dishevelled rough-looking maidens began some hurried muttering about being so distraught, and not looking for madam so early, but Susan could not listen to her, and merely putting the babe into her arms, came with her husband up the stairs, leaving little Humfrey with Nathanael.

Richard knocked at the bedroom door, and, receiving no answer, opened it. There in the tapestry-hung

chamber was the huge old bedstead with its solid posts. In it lay something motionless, but the first thing the husband and wife saw was the bent head which was lifted up by the burly but broken figure in the chair beside it.

The two knotted old hands clasped the arms of the chair, and the squire prepared to rise, his lip trembling under his white beard, and emotion working in his dejected features. They were beforehand with him. Ere he could rise both were on their knees before him, while Richard in a broken voice cried, "Father, O father!"

"Thank God that thou art come, my son," said the old man, laying his hands on his shoulders, with a gleam of joy, for as they afterwards knew, he had sorely feared for Richard's ship in the storm that had caused Humfrey's death. "I looked for thee, my daughter," he added, stretching out one hand to Susan, who kissed it. "Now it may go better with her! Speak to thy mother, Richard, she may know thy voice."

Alas! no; the recently active, ready old lady was utterly stricken, and as yet held in the deadly grasp of paralysis, unconscious of all that passed around her.

Susan found herself obliged at once to take up the reins, and become head nurse and housekeeper. The old squire trusted implicitly to her, and helplessly put the keys into her hands, and the serving-men and maids, in some shame at the condition in which the hall had been found, bestirred themselves to set it in order, so that there was a chance of the ordinary appearance of things being restored by supper-time, when Richard hoped to persuade his father to come down to his usual place.

Long before this, however, a trampling had been heard in the court, and a shrill voice, well known to Richard and Susan, was heard demanding, "Come home, is she—Master Diccon too? More shame for you, you sluttish queans and lazy lubbers, never to have let me know; but none of you have any respect——"

A visit from my Lady Countess was a greater favour to such a household as that of Bridgefield than it would be to a cottage of the present day; Richard was hurrying downstairs, and Susan only tarried to throw off the housewifely apron in which she had been compounding a cooling drink for the poor old lady, and to wash her hands, while Humfrey, rushing up to her, exclaimed "Mother, mother, is it the Queen?"

Queen Elizabeth herself was not inaptly represented by her namesake of Hardwicke, the Queen of Hallamshire, sitting on her great white mule at the door, sideways, with her feet on a board, as little children now ride, and attended by a whole troop of gentlemen ushers, maidens, prickers, and running footmen. She was a woman of the same type as the Queen, which was of course enough to stamp her as a celebrated beauty, and though she had reached middle age, her pale, clear complexion and delicate features were well preserved. Her chin was too sharp, and there was something too thin and keen about her nose and lips to promise good temper. She was small of stature, but she made up for it in dignity of presence, and as she sat there, with her rich embroidered green satin farthingale spreading out over the mule, her tall ruff standing up fanlike on her shoulders, her riding-rod in her hand, and her master of the horse standing at her rein, while a gentleman usher wielded an enormous, long-handled, green fan, to keep the sun from incommoding

her, she was, perhaps, even more magnificent than the maiden queen herself might have been in her more private expeditions. Indeed, she was new to her dignity as Countess, having been only a few weeks married to the Earl, her fourth husband. Captain Talbot did not feel it derogatory to his dignity as a gentleman to advance with his hat in his hand to kiss her hand, and put a knee to the ground as he invited her to alight, an invitation his wife heard with dismay as she reached the door, for things were by no means yet as they should be in the hall. She curtsied low, and advanced with her son holding her hand, but shrinking behind her.

"Ha, kinswoman, is it thou!" was her greeting, as she, too, kissed the small, shapely, white, but exceedingly strong hand that was extended to her; "So thou art come, and high time too. Thou shouldst never have gone a-gadding to Hull, living in lodgings, awaiting thine husband, forsooth. Thou art over young a matron for such gear, and so I told Diccon Talbot long ago."

"Yea, madam," said Richard, somewhat hotly, "and I made answer that my Susan was to be trusted, and truly no harm has come thereof."

"Ho! and you reckon it no harm that thy father and mother were left to a set of feckless, brainless, idle serving-men and maids in their trouble? Why, none would so much as have seen to thy brother's poor body being laid in a decent grave had not I been at hand to take order for it as became a distant kinsman of my lord. I tell thee, Richard, there must be no more of these vagabond seafaring ways. Thou must serve my lord, as a true retainer and kinsman is bound —Nay," in reply to a gesture, "I will not come in, I

know too well in what ill order the house is like to be. I did but take my ride this way to ask how it fared with the mistress, and try if I could shake the squire from his lethargy, if Mrs. Susan had not had the grace yet to be here. How do they?" Then in answer, "Thou must waken him, Diccon—rouse him, and tell him that I and my lord expect it of him that he should bear his loss as a true and honest Christian man, and not pule and moan, since he has a son left—ay, and a grandson. You should breed your boy up to know his manners, Susan Talbot," as Humfrey resisted an attempt to make him do his reverence to my lady; "that stout knave of yours wants the rod. Methought I heard you'd borne another, Susan! Ay! as I said it would be," as her eye fell on the swaddled babe in a maid's arms. "No lack of fools to eat up the poor old squire's substance. A maid, is it? Beshrew me, if your voyages will find portions for all your wenches! Has the leech let blood to thy goodmother, Susan? There! not one amongst you all bears any brains. Knew you not how to send up to the castle for Master Drewitt? Farewell! Thou wilt be at the lodge to-morrow to let me know how it fares with thy mother, when her brain is cleared by further blood-letting. And for the squire, let him know that I expect it of him that he shall eat, and show himself a man!"

So saying, the great lady departed, escorted as far as the avenue gate by Richard Talbot, and leaving the family gratified by her condescension, and not allowing to themselves how much their feelings were chafed.

CHAPTER III.

THE CAPTIVE.

DEATH and sorrow seemed to have marked the house of Bridgefield, for the old lady never rallied after the blood-letting enjoined by the Countess's medical science, and her husband, though for some months able to creep about the house, and even sometimes to visit the fields, had lost his memory, and became more childish week by week.

Richard Talbot was obliged to return to his ship at the end of the month, but as soon as she was laid up for the winter he resigned his command, and returned home, where he was needed to assume the part of master. In truth he became actually master before the next spring, for his father took to his bed with the first winter frosts, and in spite of the duteous cares lavished upon him by his son and daughter-in-law, passed from his bed to his grave at the Christmas feast. Richard Talbot inherited house and lands, with the undefined sense of feudal obligation to the head of his name, and ere long he was called upon to fulfil those obligations by service to his lord.

There had been another act in the great Scottish tragedy. Queen Mary had effected her escape from Lochleven, but only to be at once defeated, and then to

cross the Solway and throw herself into the hands of the English Queen.

Bolton Castle had been proved to be too perilously near the Border to serve as her residence, and the inquiry at York, and afterwards at Westminster, having proved unsatisfactory, Elizabeth had decided on detaining her in the kingdom, and committed her to the charge of the Earl of Shrewsbury.

To go into the history of that ill-managed investigation is not the purpose of this tale. It is probable that Elizabeth believed her cousin guilty, and wished to shield that guilt from being proclaimed, while her councillors, in their dread of the captive, wished to enhance the crime in Elizabeth's eyes, and were by no means scrupulous as to the kind of evidence they adduced. However, this lies outside our story; all that concerns it is that Lord Shrewsbury sent a summons to his trusty and well-beloved cousin, Richard Talbot of Bridgefield, to come and form part of the guard of honour which was to escort the Queen of Scots to Tutbury Castle, and there attend upon her.

All this time no hint had been given that the little Cicely was of alien blood. The old squire and his lady had been in no state to hear of the death of their own grandchild, or of the adoption of the orphan, and Susan was too reserved a woman to speak needlessly of her griefs to one so unsympathising as the Countess or so flighty as the daughters at the great house. The men who had brought the summons to Hull had not been lodged in the house, but at an inn, where they either had heard nothing of Master Richard's adventure or had drowned their memory in ale, for they said nothing; and thus, without any formed intention of secrecy, the child's parentage had never come into question.

Indeed, though without doubt Mrs. Talbot was very loyal in heart to her noble kinsfolk, it is not to be denied that she was a good deal more at peace when they were not at the lodge. She tried devoutly to follow out the directions of my Lady Countess, and thought herself in fault when things went amiss, but she prospered far more when free from such dictation.

She had nothing to wish except that her husband could be more often at home, but it was better to have him only a few hours' ride from her, at Chatsworth or Tutbury, than to know him exposed to the perils of the sea. He rode over as often as he could be spared, to see his family and look after his property; but his attendance was close, and my Lord and my Lady were exacting with one whom they could thoroughly trust, and it was well that in her quiet way Mistress Susan proved capable of ruling men and maids, farm and stable as well as house, servants and children, to whom another boy was added in the course of the year after her return to Bridgefield.

In the autumn, notice was sent that the Queen of Scots was to be lodged at Sheffield, and long trains of waggons and sumpter horses and mules began to arrive, bringing her plenishing and household stuff in advance. Servants without number were sent on, both by her and by the Earl, to make preparations, and on a November day, tidings came that the arrival might be expected in the afternoon. Commands were sent that the inhabitants of the little town at the park gate should keep within doors, and not come forth to give any show of welcome to their lord and lady, lest it should be taken as homage to the captive queen; but at the Manor-house there was a little family gathering to hail the Earl and Countess. It

chiefly consisted of ladies with their children, the husbands of most being in the suite of the Earl acting as escort or guard to the Queen. Susan Talbot, being akin to the family on both sides, was there with the two elder children; Humfrey, both that he might greet his father the sooner, and that he might be able to remember the memorable arrival of the captive queen, and Cicely, because he had clamoured loudly for her company. Lady Talbot, of the Herbert blood, wife to the heir, was present with two young sisters-in-law, Lady Grace, daughter to the Earl, and Mary, daughter to the Countess, who had been respectively married to Sir Henry Cavendish and Sir Gilbert Talbot, a few weeks before their respective parents were wedded, when the brides were only twelve and fourteen years old. There, too, was Mrs. Babington of Dethick, the recent widow of a kinsman of Lord Shrewsbury, to whom had been granted the wardship of her son, and the little party waiting in the hall also numbered Elizabeth and William Cavendish, the Countess's youngest children, and many dependants mustered in the background, ready for the reception. Indeed, the castle and manor-house, with their offices, lodges, and outbuildings, were an absolute little city in themselves. The castle was still kept in perfect repair, for the battle of Bosworth was not quite beyond the memory of living men's fathers; and besides, who could tell whether any day England might not have to be contested inch by inch with the Spaniard? So the gray walls stood on the tongue of land in the valley, formed by the junction of the rivers Sheaf and Dun, with towers at all the gateways, enclosing a space of no less than eight acres, and with the actual fortress, crisp, strong, hard, and unmouldered in the midst, its

tallest square tower serving as a look-out place for those who watched to give the first intimation of the arrival.

The castle had its population, but chiefly of grooms, warders, and their families. The state-rooms high up in that square tower were so exceedingly confined, so stern and grim, that the grandfather of the present earl had built a manor-house for his family residence on the sloping ground on the farther side of the Dun.

This house, built of stone, timber, and brick, with two large courts, two gardens, and three yards, covered nearly as much space as the castle itself. A pleasant, smooth, grass lawn lay in front, and on it converged the avenues of oaks and walnuts, stretching towards the gates of the park, narrowing to the eye into single lines, then going absolutely out of sight, and the sea of foliage presenting the utmost variety of beautiful tints of orange, yellow, brown, and red. There was a great gateway between two new octagon towers of red brick, with battlements and dressings of stone, and from this porch a staircase led upwards to the great stone-paved hall, with a huge fire burning on the open hearth. Around it had gathered the ladies of the Talbot family waiting for the reception. The warder on the tower had blown his horn as a signal that the master and his royal guest were within the park, and the banner of the Talbots had been raised to announce their coming, but nearly half an hour must pass while the party came along the avenue from the drawbridge over the Sheaf ere they could arrive at the lodge.

So the ladies, in full state dresses, hovered over the fire, while the children played in the window seat near at hand.

Gilbert Talbot's wife, a thin, yellow-haired, young creature, promising to be like her mother, the Countess, had a tongue which loved to run, and with the precocity and importance of wifehood at sixteen, she dilated to her companions on her mother's constant attendance on the Queen, and the perpetual plots for that lady's escape. "She is as shifty and active as any cat-a-mount; and at Chatsworth she had a scheme for being off out of her bedchamber window to meet a traitor fellow named Roll; but my husband smelt it out in good time, and had the guard beneath my lady's window, and the fellows are in gyves, and to see the lady the day it was found out! Not a wry face did she make. Oh no! 'Twas all my good lord, and my sweet sir with her. I promise you butter would not melt in her mouth, for my Lord Treasurer Cecil hath been to see her, and he has promised to bring her to speech of her Majesty. May I be there to see. I promise you 'twill be diamond cut diamond between them."

"How did she and my Lord Treasurer fare together?" asked Mrs. Babington.

"Well, you know there's not a man of them all that is proof against her blandishments. Her Majesty should have women warders for her. 'Twas good sport to see the furrows in his old brow smoothing out against his will as it were, while she plied him with her tongue. I never saw the Queen herself win such a smile as came on his lips, but then he is always a sort of master, or tutor, as it were, to the Queen. Ay," on some exclamation from Lady Talbot, "she heeds him like no one else. She may fling out, and run counter to him for the very pleasure of feeling that she has the power, but she will come round at last, and 'tis his will that is done in the long run. If this lady

could beguile him indeed, she might be a free woman in the end."

"And think you that she did?"

"Not she! The Lord Treasurer is too long-headed, and has too strong a hate to all Papistry, to be beguiled more than for the very moment he was before her. He cannot help the being a man, you see, and they are all alike when once in her presence—your lord and father, like the rest of them, sister Grace. Mark me if there be not tempests brewing, an we be not the sooner rid of this guest of ours. My mother is not the woman to bear it long."

Dame Mary's tongue was apt to run on too fast, and Lady Talbot interrupted its career with an amused gesture towards the children.

For the little Cis, babe as she was, had all the three boys at her service. Humfrey, with a paternal air, was holding her on the window-seat; Antony Babington was standing to receive the ball that was being tossed to and fro between them, but as she never caught it, Will Cavendish was content to pick it up every time and return it to her, appearing amply rewarded by her laugh of delight.

The two mothers could not but laugh, and Mrs. Babington said the brave lads were learning their knightly courtesy early, while Mary Talbot began observing on the want of likeness between Cis and either the Talbot or Hardwicke race. The little girl was much darker in colouring than any of the boys, and had a pair of black, dark, heavy brows, that prevented her from being a pretty child. Her adopted mother shrank from such observations, and was rejoiced that a winding of horns, and a shout from the boys, announced that the expected arrival was about to take place. The

ladies darted to the window, and beholding the avenue full of horsemen and horsewomen, their accoutrements and those of their escort gleaming in the sun, each mother gathered her own chicks to herself, smoothed the plumage somewhat ruffled by sport, and advanced to the head of the stone steps, William Cavendish, the eldest of the boys, being sent down to take his step-father's rein and hold his stirrup, page fashion.

Clattering and jingling the troop arrived. The Earl, a stout, square man, with a long narrow face, lengthened out farther by a light-coloured, silky beard, which fell below his ruff, descended from his steed, gave his hat to Richard Talbot, and handed from her horse a hooded and veiled lady of slender proportions, who leant on his arm as she ascended the steps.

The ladies knelt, whether in respect to the heads of the family, or to the royal guest, may be doubtful.

The Queen came up the stairs with rheumatic steps, declaring, however, as she did so, that she felt the better for her ride, and was less fatigued than when she set forth. She had the soft, low, sweet Scottish voice, and a thorough Scottish accent and language, tempered, however, by French tones, and as, coming into the warmer air of the hall, she withdrew her veil, her countenance was seen. Mary Stuart was only thirty-one at this time, and her face was still youthful, though worn and wearied, and bearing tokens of illness. The features were far from being regularly beautiful; there was a decided cast in one of the eyes, and in spite of all that Mary Talbot's detracting tongue had said, Susan's first impression was disappointment. But, as the Queen greeted the lady whom she already knew, and the Earl presented his daughter, Lady Grace, his stepdaughter, Elizabeth

Cavendish, and his kinswoman, Mistress Susan Talbot, the extraordinary magic of her eye and lip beamed on them, the queenly grace and dignity joined with a wonderful sweetness impressed them all, and each in measure felt the fascination.

The Earl led the Queen to the fire to obtain a little warmth before mounting the stairs to her own apartments, and likewise while Lady Shrewsbury was dismounting, and being handed up the stairs by her second stepson, Gilbert. The ladies likewise knelt on one knee to greet this mighty dame, and the children should have done so too, but little Cis, catching sight of Captain Richard, who had come up bearing the Earl's hat, in immediate attendance on him, broke out with an exulting cry of "Father! father! father!" trotted with outspread arms right in front of the royal lady, embraced the booted leg in ecstasy, and then stretching out, exclaimed "Up! up!"

"How now, malapert poppet!" exclaimed the Countess, and though at some distance, uplifted her riding-rod. Susan was ready to sink into the earth with confusion at the great lady's displeasure, but Richard had stooped and lifted the little maid in his arms, while Queen Mary turned, her face lit up as by a sunbeam, and said, "Ah, bonnibell, art thou fain to see thy father? Wilt thou give me one of thy kisses, sweet bairnie?" and as Richard held her up to the kind face, "A goodly child, brave sir. Thou must let me have her at times for a playfellow. Wilt come and comfort a poor prisoner, little sweeting?"

The child responded with "Poor poor," stroking the soft delicate cheek, but the Countess interfered, still wrathful. "Master Richard, I marvel that you should let her Grace be beset by a child, who, if she cannot

demean herself decorously, should have been left at home. Susan Hardwicke, I thought I had schooled you better."

"Nay, madam, may not a babe's gentle deed of pity be pardoned?" said Mary.

"Oh! if it pleasures you, madam, so be it," said Lady Shrewsbury, deferentially; "but there be children here more worthy of your notice than yonder little black-browed wench, who hath been allowed to thrust herself forward, while others have been kept back from importuning your Grace."

"No child can importune a mother who is cut off from her own," said Mary, eager to make up for the jealousy she had excited. "Is this bonnie laddie yours, madam? Ah! I should have known it by the resemblance."

She held her white hand to receive the kisses of the boys: William Cavendish, under his mother's eye, knelt obediently; Antony Babington, a fair, pretty lad, of eight or nine, of a beautiful pink and white complexion, pressed forward with an eager devotion which made the Queen smile and press her delicate hand on his curled locks; as for Humfrey, he retreated behind the shelter of his mother's farthingale, where his presence was forgotten by every one else, and, after the rebuff just administered to Cicely, there was no inclination to bring him to light, or combat with his bashfulness.

The introductions over, Mary gave her hand to the Earl to be conducted from the hall up the broad staircase, and along the great western gallery to the south front, where for many days her properties had been in course of being arranged.

Lady Shrewsbury followed as mistress of the house,

and behind, in order of precedence, came the Scottish Queen's household, in which the dark, keen features of the French, and the rufous hues of the Scots, were nearly equally divided. Lady Livingstone and Mistress Seaton, two of the Queen's Maries of the same age with herself, came next, the one led by Lord Talbot, the other by Lord Livingstone. There was also the faithful French Marie de Courcelles, paired with Master Beatoun, comptroller of the household, and Jean Kennedy, a stiff Scotswoman, whose hard outlines did not do justice to her tenderness and fidelity, and with her was a tall, active, keen-faced stripling, looked on with special suspicion by the English, as Willie Douglas, the contriver of the Queen's flight from Loch-leven. Two secretaries, French and Scottish, were shrewdly suspected of being priests, and there were besides, a physician, surgeon, apothecary, with perfumers, cooks, pantlers, scullions, lacqueys, to the number of thirty, besides their wives and attendants, these last being "permitted of my lord's benevolence."

They were all eyed askance by the sturdy, north country English, who naturally hated all strangers, above all French and Scotch, and viewed the band of captives much like a caged herd of wild beasts.

When on the way home Mistress Susan asked her little boy why he would not make his obeisance to the pretty lady, he sturdily answered, "She is no pretty lady of mine. She is an evil woman who slew her husband."

"Poor lady! tongues have been busy with her," said his father.

"How, sir?" asked Susan, amazed, "do you think her guiltless in the matter?"

"I cannot tell," returned Richard. "All I know is

that many who have no mercy on her would change their minds if they beheld her patient and kindly demeanour to all."

This was a sort of shock to Susan, as it seemed to her to prove the truth of little Lady Talbot's words, that no one was proof against Queen Mary's wiles; but she was happy in having her husband at home once more, though, as he told her, he would be occupied most of each alternate day at Sheffield, he and another relation having been appointed "gentlemen porters," which meant that they were to wait in a chamber at the foot of the stairs, and keep watch over whatever went in or out of the apartments of the captive and her suite.

"And," said Richard, "who think you came to see me at Wingfield? None other than Cuthbert Langston."

"Hath he left his merchandise at Hull?"

"Ay, so he saith. He would fain have had my good word to my lord for a post in the household, as comptroller of accounts, clerk, or the like. It seemed as though there were no office he would not take so that he might hang about the neighbourhood of this queen."

"Then you would not grant him your recommendation?"

"Nay, truly. I could not answer for him, and his very anxiety made me the more bent on not bringing him hither. I'd fain serve in no ship where I know not the honesty of all the crew, and Cuthbert hath ever had a hankering after the old profession."

"Verily then it were not well to bring him hither."

"Moreover, he is a lover of mysteries and schemes," said Richard. "He would never be content to let

alone the question of our little wench's birth, and would be fretting us for ever about the matter."

"Did he speak of it?"

"Yea. He would have me to wit that a nurse and babe had been put on board at Dumbarton. Well, said I, and so they must have been, since on board they were. Is that all thou hast to tell me? And mighty as was the work he would have made of it, this was all he seemed to know. I asked, in my turn, how he came to know thus much about a vessel sailing from a port in arms against the Lords of the Congregation, the allies of her Majesty?"

"What said he?"

"That his house had dealings with the owners of the *Bride of Dunbar*. I like not such dealings, and so long as this lady and her train are near us, I would by no means have him whispering here and there that she is a Scottish orphan."

"It would chafe my Lady Countess!" said Susan, to whom this was a serious matter. "Yet doth it not behove us to endeavour to find out her parentage?"

"I tell you I proved to myself that he knew nothing, and all that we have to do is to hinder him from making mischief out of that little," returned Richard impatiently.

The honest captain could scarcely have told the cause of his distrust or of his secrecy, but he had a general feeling that to let an intriguer like Cuthbert Langston rake up any tale that could be connected with the party of the captive queen, could only lead to danger and trouble.

"Never mind, Cis," interposed one of the boys—"we shall lose all our play time if you try to make him do it with a grace. Curtsies are women's work—go on."

"Where was I? O—" (resuming her dignity after these asides) "Thou hast a new farthingale, I see."

"To do my poor honour to your Grace's birthday.

"Oh ho! Is it so? Methought it had been to do honour to my fair mistress's own taper waist. And pray how much an ell was yonder broidered stuff?"

"Two crowns, an't please your Grace," returned the supposed lady, making a wild conjecture.

"Two crowns! thou foolish Antony!" Then recollecting herself, "two crowns! what, when mine costs but half! Thou presumptuous, lavish varlet—no, no, wench! what right hast thou to wear gowns finer than thy liege?—I'll teach you." Wherewith, erecting all her talons, and clawing frightfully with them in the air, the supposed Queen Bess leapt at the unfortunate maid of honour, appeared to tear the imaginary robe, and drove her victim off the stage with a great air of violence, amid peals of laughter from the other children, loud enough to drown those of the elders, who could hardly restrain their merriment. Gilbert Talbot, however, had been looking about him anxiously all the time, and would fain have moved away; but a sign from Queen Mary withheld him, as one of the children cried,

"Now! show us how she serves her lords."

The play seemed well understood between them, for the mimic queen again settled herself on her throne, while Will Cavendish, calling out, "Now I'm Master Hatton," began to tread a stately measure on the grass, while the queen exclaimed, "Who is this

new star of my court? What stalwart limbs, what graceful tread! Who art thou, sir?"

"Madam, I am—I am. What is it? An ef—ef——"

"A daddy-long-legs," mischievously suggested another of the group.

"No, it's Latin. Is it Ephraim? No; it's a fly, something like a gnat" (then at an impatient gesture from her Majesty) "disporting itself in the beams of the noontide sun."

"Blood-sucking," whispered the real Queen behind the fern. "He is not so far out there. See! see! with what a grace the child holds out her little hand for him to kiss. I doubt me if Elizabeth herself could be more stately. But who comes here?"

"I'm Sir Philip Sydney."

"No, no," shouted Humfrey, "Sir Philip shall not come into this fooling. My father says he's the best knight in England."

"He is as bad as the rest in flattery to the Queen," returned young Cavendish.

"I'll not have it, I say. You may be Lord Leicester an you will! He's but Robin Dudley."

"Ah!" began the lad, now advancing and shading his eyes. "What burnished splendour dazzles my weak sight? Is it a second Juno that I behold, or lovely Venus herself? Nay, there is a wisdom in her that can only belong to the great Minerva herself! So youthful too. Is it Hebe descended to this earth?"

Cis smirked, and held out a hand, saying in an affected tone, "Lord Earl, are thy wits astray?"

"Whose wits would not be perturbed at the mere sight of such exquisite beauty?"

"Come and sit at our feet, and we will try to restore them," said the stage queen; but here little Diccon,

"Never mind, Cis," interposed one of the boys—"we shall lose all our play time if you try to make him do it with a grace. Curtsies are women's work—go on."

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the youngest of the party, eager for more action, called out, "Show us how she treats her lords and ladies together."

On which young Babington, as the lady, and Humfrey, made demonstrations of love-making and betrothal, upon which their sovereign lady descended on them with furious tokens of indignation, abusing them right and left, until in the midst the great castle bell pealed forth, and caused a flight general, being, in fact, the summons to the school kept in one of the castle chambers by one Master Snigg, or Sniggius, for the children of the numerous colony who peopled the castle. Girls, as well as boys, were taught there, and thus Cis accompanied Humfrey and Diccon, and consorted with their companions.

Queen Mary was allowed to hunt and take out-of-door exercise in the park whenever she pleased, but Lord Shrewsbury, or one of his sons, Gilbert and Francis, never was absent from her for a moment when she went beyond the door of the lesser lodge, which the Earl had erected for her, with a flat, leaded, and parapeted roof, where she could take the air, and with only one entrance, where was stationed a "gentleman porter," with two subordinates, whose business it was to keep a close watch over every person or thing that went in or out. If she had any purpose of losing herself in the thickets of fern, or copsewood, in the park, or holding unperceived conference under shelter of the chase, these plans were rendered impossible by the pertinacious presence of one or other of the Talbots, who acted completely up to their name.

Thus it was that the Queen, with Gilbert in close attendance, had found herself an unseen spectator of the children's performance, which she watched with

the keen enjoyment that sometimes made her forget her troubles for the moment.

"How got the imps such knowledge?" mused Gilbert Talbot, as he led the Queen out on the sward which had been the theatre of their mimicry.

"Do *you* ask that, Sir Gilbert?" said the Queen with emphasis, for indeed it was his wife who had been the chief retailer of scandal about Queen Elizabeth, to the not unwilling ears of herself and his mother; and Antony Babington, as my lady's page, had but used his opportunities.

"They are insolent varlets and deserve the rod," continued Gilbert.

"You are too ready with the rod, you English," returned Mary. "You flog all that is clever and spirited out of your poor children!"

"That is the question, madam. Have the English been found so deficient in spirit compared with other nations?"

"Ah! we all know what you English can say for yourselves," returned the Queen. "See what Master John Coke hath made of the herald's argument before Dame Renown, in his translation. He hath twisted all the other way."

"Yea, madam, but the French herald had it all his own way before. So it was but just we should have our turn."

Here a cry from the other hunters greeted them, and they found Lord Shrewsbury, some of the ladies, and a number of prickers, looking anxiously for them.

"Here we are, good my lord," said the Queen, who, when free from rheumatism, was a most active walker. "We have only been stalking my sister Queen's court

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in small, the prettiest and drollest pastime I have seen for many a long day."

Much had happened in the course of the past years. The intrigues with Northumberland and Norfolk, and the secret efforts of the unfortunate Queen to obtain friends, and stir up enemies against Elizabeth, had resulted in her bonds being drawn closer and closer. The Rising of the North had taken place, and Cuthbert Langston had been heard of as taking a prominent part beneath the sacred banner, but he had been wounded and not since heard of, and his kindred knew not whether he were among the unnamed dead who loaded the trees in the rear of the army of Sussex, or whether he had escaped beyond seas. Richard Talbot still remained as one of the trusted kinsmen of Lord Shrewsbury, on whom that nobleman depended for the execution of the charge which yearly became more wearisome and onerous, as hope decayed and plots thickened.

Though resident in the new lodge with her train, it was greatly diminished by the dismissal from time to time of persons who were regarded as suspicious; Mary still continued on intimate terms with Lady Shrewsbury and her daughters, specially distinguishing with her favour Bessie Pierrepoint, the eldest grandchild of the Countess, who slept with her, and was her plaything and her pupil in French and needlework. The fiction of her being guest and not prisoner had not entirely passed away; visitors were admitted, and she went in and out of the lodge, walked or rode at will, only under pretext of courtesy. She never was unaccompanied by the Earl or one of his sons, and they endeavoured to make all private conversation with strangers, or persons unauthorised from Court, impossible to her.

The invitation given to little Cicely on the arrival had not been followed up. The Countess wished to reserve to her own family all the favours of one who might at any moment become the Queen of England, and she kept Susan Talbot and her children in what she called their meet place, in which that good lady thoroughly acquiesced, having her hands much too full of household affairs to run after queens.

There was a good deal of talk about this child's play, a thing which had much better have been left where it was; but in a seclusion like that of Sheffield subjects of conversation were not over numerous, and every topic which occurred was apt to be worried to shreds. So Lady Shrewsbury and her daughters heard the Queen's arch description of the children's mimicry, and instantly conceived a desire to see the scene repeated. The gentlemen did not like it at all: their loyalty was offended at the insult to her gracious Majesty, and besides, what might not happen if such sports ever came to her ears? However, the Countess ruled Sheffield; and Mary Talbot and Bessie Cavendish ruled the Countess, and they were bent on their own way. So the representation was to take place in the great hall of the manor-house, and the actors were to be dressed in character from my lady's stores.

"They will ruin it, these clumsy English, after their own fashion," said Queen Mary, among her ladies. "It was the unpremeditated grace and innocent audacity of the little ones that gave the charm. Now it will be a mere broad farce, worthy of Bess of Hardwicke. *Mais que voulez vous?*"

The performance was, however, laid under a great disadvantage by the absolute refusal of Richard and Susan Talbot to allow their Cicely to assume the part

of Queen Elizabeth. They had been dismayed at her doing so in child's play, and since she could read fluently, write pretty well, and cipher a little, the good mother had decided to put a stop to this free association with the boys at the castle, and to keep her at home to study needlework and housewifery. As to her acting with boys before the assembled households, the proposal seemed to them absolutely insulting to any daughter of the Talbot line, and they had by this time forgotten that she was no such thing. Bess Cavendish, the special spoilt child of the house, even rode down, armed with her mother's commands, but her feudal feeling did not here sway Mistress Susan.

Public acting was esteemed an indignity for women, and, though Cis was a mere child, all Susan's womanhood awoke, and she made answer firmly that she could not obey my Lady Countess in this.

Bess flounced out of the house, indignantly telling her she should rue the day, and Cis herself cried passionately, longing after the fine robes and jewels, and the presentation of herself as a queen before the whole company of the castle. The harsh system of the time made the good mother think it her duty to requite this rebellion with the rod, and to set the child down to her seam in the corner, and there sat Cis, pouting and brooding over what Antony Babington had told her of what he had picked up when in his page's capacity, attending his lady, of Queen Mary's admiration of the pretty ways and airs of the little mimic Queen Bess, till she felt as if she were defrauded of her due. The captive Queen was her dream, and to hear her commendations, perhaps be kissed by her, would be supreme bliss. Nay, she still hoped that

there would be an interference of the higher powers on her behalf, which would give her a triumph.

No! Captain Talbot came home, saying, "So, Mistress Sue, thou art a steadfast woman, to have resisted my lady's will!"

"I knew, my good husband, that thou wouldst never see our Cis even in sport a player!"

"Assuredly not, and thou hadst the best of it, for when Mistress Bess came in as full of wrath as a petard of powder, and made your refusal known, my lord himself cried out, 'And she's in the right o't! What a child may do in sport is not fit for a gentlewoman in earnest.'"

"Then, hath not my lord put a stop to the whole?"

"Fain would he do so, but the Countess and her daughters are set on carrying out the sport. They have set Master Sniggius to indite the speeches, and the boys of the school are to take the parts for their autumn interlude."

"Surely that is perilous, should it come to the knowledge of those at Court."

"Oh, I promise you, Sniggius hath a device for disguising all that could give offence. The Queen will become Semiramis or Zenobia, I know not which, and my Lord of Leicester, Master Hatton, and the others, will be called Ninus or Longinus, or some such heathenish long-tailed terms, and speak speeches of mighty length. Are they to be in Latin, Humfrey?"

"Oh no, sir," said Humfrey, with a shudder. "Master Sniggius would have had them so, but the young ladies said they would have nothing to do with the affair if there were one word of Latin uttered. It is bad enough as it is. I am to be Philidaspes, an

Assyrian knight, and have some speeches to learn, at least one is twenty-five lines, and not one is less than five!"

"A right requital for thy presumptuous and treasonable game, my son," said his father, teasing him.

"And who is to be the Queen?" asked the mother.

"Antony Babington," said Humfrey, "because he can amble and mince more like a wench than any of us. The worse luck for him. He will have more speeches than any one of us to learn."

The report of the number of speeches to be learnt took off the sting of Cis's disappointment, though she would not allow that it did so, declaring with truth that she could learn by hearing faster than any of the boys. Indeed, she did learn all Humfrey's speeches, and Antony's to boot, and assisted both of them with all her might in committing them to memory.

As Captain Talbot had foretold, the boys' sport was quite sufficiently punished by being made into earnest. Master Sniggius was far from merciful as to length, and his satire was so extremely remote that Queen Elizabeth herself could hardly have found out that Zenobia's fine moral lecture on the vanities of too aspiring ruffs was founded on the box on the ear which rewarded poor Lady Mary Howard's display of her rich petticoat, nor would her cheeks have tingled when the Queen of the East—by a bold adaptation—played the part of Lion in interrupting the interview of our old friends Pyramus and Thisbe, who, by an awful anachronism, were carried to Palmyra. It was no plagiarism from "Midsummer Night's Dream," only drawn from the common stock of playwrights.

So, shorn of all that was perilous, and only understood by the initiated, the play took place in the Castle

Hall, the largest available place, with Queen Mary seated upon the dais, with a canopy of State over her head, Lady Shrewsbury on a chair nearly as high, the Earl, the gentlemen and ladies of their suites drawn up in a circle, the servants where they could, the Earl's musicians thundering with drums, tooting with fifes, twanging on fiddles, overhead in a gallery. Cis and Diccon, on either side of Susan Talbot, gazing on the stage, where, much encumbered by hoop and farthingale, and arrayed in a yellow curled wig, strutted forth Antony Babington, declaiming—

> "Great Queen Zenobia am I,
> The Roman Power I defy.
> At my Palmyra, in the East,
> I rule o'er every man and beast."

Here was an allusion couched in the Roman power, which Master Antony had missed, or he would hardly have uttered it, since he was of a Roman Catholic family, though, while in the Earl's household, he had to conform outwardly.

A slender, scholarly lad, with a pretty, innocent face, and a voice that could "speak small, like a woman," came in and announced himself thus—

> "I'm Thisbe, an Assyrian maid,
> My robe's with jewels overlaid."

The stiff colloquy between the two boys, encumbered with their dresses, shy and awkward, and rehearsing their lines like a task, was no small contrast to the merry impromptu under the oak, and the gay, free grace of the children.

Poor Philidaspes acquitted himself worst of all, for when done up in a glittering suit of sham armour, with

a sword and dagger of lath, his entire speech, though well conned, deserted him, and he stood red-faced, hesitating, and ready to cry, when suddenly from the midst of the spectators there issued a childish voice, "Go on, Humfrey!

> "Philidaspes am I, most valorous knight,
> Ever ready for Church and Queen to fight.

"Go on, I say!" and she gave a little stamp of impatience, to the extreme confusion of the mother and the great amusement of the assembled company. Humfrey, once started, delivered himself of the rest of his oration in a glum and droning voice, occasioning fits of laughter, such as by no means added to his self-possession.

The excellent Sniggius and his company of boys had certainly, whether intentionally or not, deprived the performance of all its personal sting, and most likewise of its interest. Such diversion as the spectators derived was such as Hippolyta seems to have found in listening to Wall, Lion, Moonshine and Co.; but, like Theseus, Lord Shrewsbury was very courteous, and complimented both playwright and actors, relieved and thankful, no doubt, that Queen Zenobia was so unlike his royal mistress.

There was nothing so much enforced by Queen Elizabeth as that strangers should not have resort to Sheffield Castle. No spectators, except those attached to the household, and actually forming part of the colony within the park, were therefore supposed to be admitted, and all of them were carefully kept at a distant part of the hall, where they could have no access to the now much reduced train of the Scottish Queen, with whom all intercourse was forbidden.

Humfrey was therefore surprised when, just as he had come out of the tiring-room, glad to divest himself of his encumbering and gaudy equipments, a man touched him on the arm and humbly said, "Sir, I have a humble entreaty to make of you. If you would convey my petition to the Queen of Scots!"

"I have nothing to do with the Queen of Scots," said the ex-Philidaspes, glancing suspiciously at the man's sleeve, where, however, he saw the silver dog, the family badge.

"She is a charitable lady," continued the man, who looked like a groom, "and if she only knew that my poor old aunt is lying famishing, she would aid her. Pray you, good my lord, help me to let this scroll reach to her."

"I'm no lord, and I have naught to do with the Queen," repeated Humfrey, while at the same moment Antony, who had been rather longer in getting out of his female attire, presented himself; and Humfrey, pitying the man's distress, said, "This young gentleman is the Countess's page. He sometimes sees the Queen."

The man eagerly told his story, how his aunt, the widow of a huckster, had gone on with the trade till she had been cruelly robbed and beaten, and now was utterly destitute, needing aid to set herself up again. The Queen of Scots was noted for her beneficent almsgiving, and a few silver pieces from her would be quite sufficient to replenish her basket.

Neither boy doubted a moment. Antony had the *entrée* to the presence chamber, where on this festival night the Earl and Countess were sure to be with the Queen. He went straightway thither, and trained as he was in the usages of the place, told his business to the Earl, who was seated near the Queen. Lord

Shrewsbury took the petition from him, glanced it over, and asked, "Who knew the Guy Norman who sent it?" Frank Talbot answered for him, that he was a yeoman pricker, and the Earl permitted the paper to be carried to Mary, watching her carefully as she read it, when Antony had presented it on one knee.

"Poor woman!" she said, "it is a piteous case. Master Beatoun, hast thou my purse? Here, Master Babington, wilt thou be the bearer of this angel for me, since I know that the delight of being the bearer will be a reward to thy kind heart."

Antony gracefully kissed the fair hand, and ran off joyously with the Queen's bounty. Little did any one guess what the career thus begun would bring that fair boy.

CHAPTER V.

THE HUCKSTERING WOMAN.

THE huckstering woman, Tibbott by name, was tended by Queen Mary's apothecary, and in due time was sent off well provided, to the great fair of York, whence she returned with a basket of needles, pins (such as they were), bodkins, and the like articles, wherewith to circulate about Hallamshire, but the gate-wards would not relax their rules so far as to admit her into the park. She was permitted, however, to bring her wares to the town of Sheffield, and to Bridgefield, but she might come no farther.

Thither Antony Babington came down to lay out the crown which had been given to him on his birthday, and indeed half Master Sniggius's scholars discovered needs, and came down either to spend, or to give advice to the happy owners of groats and testers. So far so good; but the huckster-woman soon made Bridgefield part of her regular rounds, and took little commissions which she executed for the household of Sheffield, who were, as the Cavendish sisters often said in their spleen, almost as much prisoners as the Queen of Scots. Antony Babington was always her special patron, and being Humfrey's great companion and playfellow, he was allowed to come in and out of the gates

unquestioned, to play with him and with Cis, who no longer went to school, but was trained at home in needlework and housewifery.

Match-making began at so early an age, that when Mistress Susan had twice found her and Antony Babington with their heads together over the lamentable ballad of the cold fish that had been a lady, and which sang its own history "forty thousand fathom above water," she began to question whether the girl were the attraction. He was now an orphan, and his wardship and marriage had been granted to the Earl, who, having disposed of all his daughters and stepdaughters, except Bessie Cavendish, might very fairly bestow on the daughter of his kinsman so good a match as the young squire of Dethick.

"Then should we have to consider of her parentage," said Richard, when his wife had propounded her views.

"I never can bear in mind that the dear wench is none of ours," said Susan. "Thou didst say thou wouldst portion her as if she were our own little maid, and I have nine webs ready for her household linen. Must we speak of her as a stranger?"

"It would scarce be just towards another family to let them deem her of true Talbot blood, if she were to enter among them," said Richard; "though I look on the little merry maid as if she were mine own child. But there is no need yet to begin upon any such coil; and, indeed, I would wager that my lady hath other views for young Babington."

After all, parents often know very little of what passes in children's minds, and Cis never hinted to her mother that the bond of union between her and Antony was devotion to the captive Queen. Cis had only had a glimpse or two of her, riding by when hunting or hawk-

ing, or when, on festive occasions, all who were privileged to enter the park were mustered together, among whom the Talbots ranked high as kindred to both Earl and Countess; but those glimpses had been enough to fill the young heart with romance, such as the matter-of-fact elders never guessed at. Antony Babington, who was often actually in the gracious presence, and received occasional smiles, and even greetings, was immeasurably devoted to the Queen, and maintained Cicely's admiration by his vivid descriptions of the kindness, the grace, the charms of the royal captive, in contrast with the innate vulgarity of their own Countess.

Willie Douglas (the real Roland Græme of the escape from Lochleven) had long ago been dismissed from Mary's train, with all the other servants who were deemed superfluous; but Antony had heard the details of the story from Jean Kennedy (Mrs. Kennett, as the English were pleased to call her), and Willie was the hero of his emulative imagination.

"What would I not do to be like him!" he fervently exclaimed when he had narrated the story to Humfrey and Cis, as they lay on a nest in the fern one fine autumn day, resting after an expedition to gather blackberries for the mother's preserving.

"I would not be him for anything," said Humfrey.

"Fie, Humfrey," cried Cis; "would not you dare exile or anything else in a good cause?"

"For a good cause, ay," said Humfrey in his stolid way.

"And what can be a better cause than that of the fairest of captive queens?" exclaimed Antony, hotly.

"I would not be a traitor," returned Humfrey, as he lay on his back, looking up through the chequer-work of the branches of the trees towards the sky.

"Who dares link the word traitor with my name?" said Babington, feeling for the imaginary handle of a sword.

"Not I; but you'll get it linked if you go on in this sort."

"For shame, Humfrey," again cried Cis, passionately. "Why, delivering imprisoned princesses always was the work of a true knight."

"Yea; but they first defied the giant openly," said Humfrey.

"What of that?" said Antony.

"They did not do it under trust," said Humfrey.

"I am not under trust," said Antony. "Your father may be a sworn servant of the Earl and the Queen—Queen Elizabeth, I mean; but I have taken no oaths—nobody asked me if I would come here."

"No," said Humfrey, knitting his brows; "but you see we are all trusted to go in and out as we please, on the understanding that we do nought that can be unfaithful to the Earl; and I suppose it was thus with this same Willie Douglas."

"She was his own true and lawful Queen," cried Cis. "His first duty was to her."

Humfrey sat up and looked perplexed, but with a sudden thought exclaimed, "No Scots are we, thanks be to Heaven! and what might be loyalty in him would be rank treason in us."

"How know you that?" said Antony. "I have heard those who say that our lawful Queen is there," and he pointed towards the walls that rose in the distance above the woods.

Humfrey rose wrathful. "Then truly you are no better than a traitor, and a Spaniard, and a Papist," and fists were clenched on both sides, while Cis flew

between, pulling down Humfrey's uplifted hand, and crying, "No, no; he did not say he thought so, only he had heard it."

"Let him say it again!" growled Antony, his arm bared.

"No, don't, Humfrey!" as if she saw it between his clenched teeth. "You know you only meant if Tony thought so, and he didn't. Now how can you two be so foolish and unkind to me, to bring me out for a holiday to eat blackberries and make heather crowns, and then go and spoil it all with folly about Papists, and Spaniards, and grown-up people's nonsense that nobody cares about!"

Cis had a rare power over both her comrades, and her piteous appeal actually disarmed them, since there was no one present to make them ashamed of their own placability. Grown-up people's follies were avoided by mutual consent through the rest of the walk, and the three children parted amicably when Antony had to return to fulfil his page's duties at my lord's supper, and Humfrey and Cis carried home their big basket of blackberries.

When they entered their own hall they found their mother engaged in conversation with a tall, stout, and weather-beaten man, whom she announced—"See here, my children, here is a good friend of your father's, Master Goatley, who was his chief mate in all his voyages, and hath now come over all the way from Hull to see him! He will be here anon, sir, so soon as the guard is changed at the Queen's lodge. Meantime, here are the elder children."

Diccon, who had been kept at home by some temporary damage to his foot, and little Edward were devouring the sailor with their eyes; and Humfrey

and Cis were equally delighted with the introduction, especially as Master Goatley was just returned from the Western Main, and from a curious grass-woven basket which he carried slung to his side, produced sundry curiosities in the way of beads, shell-work, feather-work, and a hatchet of stone, and even a curious armlet of soft, dull gold, with pearls set in it. This he had, with great difficulty, obtained on purpose for Mistress Talbot, who had once cured him of a bad festering hurt received on board ship.

The children clustered round in ecstasies of admiration and wonder as they heard of the dark brown natives, the curious expedients by which barter was carried on; also of cruel Spaniards, and of savage fishes, with all the marvels of flying-fish, corals, palm-trees, humming birds—all that is lesson work to our modern youth, but was the most brilliant of living fairy tales at this Elizabethan period. Humfrey and Diccon were ready to rush off to voyage that instant, and even little Ned cried imitatively in his imperfect language that he would be "a tailor."

Then their father came home, and joyfully welcomed and clasped hands with his faithful mate, declaring that the sight did him good; and they sat down to supper and talked of voyages, till the boys' eyes' glowed, and they beat upon their own knees with the enthusiasm that their strict manners bade them repress; while their mother kept back her sighs as she saw them becoming infected with that sea fever so dreaded by parents. Nay, she saw it in her husband himself. She knew him to be grievously weary of a charge most monotonously dull, and only varied by suspicions and petty detections; and that he was hungering and thirsting for his good ship and to be

facing winds and waves. She could hear his longing in the very sound of the "Ays?" and brief inquiries by which he encouraged Goatley to proceed in the story of voyages and adventures, and she could not wonder when Goatley said, "Your heart is in it still, sir. Not one of us all but says it is a pity such a noble captain should be lost as a landsman, with nothing to do but to lock the door on a lady."

"Speak not of it, my good Goatley," said Richard, hastily, "or you will set me dreaming and make me mad."

"Then it is indeed so," returned Goatley. "Wherefore then come you not, sir, where a crew is waiting for you of as good fellows as ever stepped on a deck, and who, one and all, are longing after such a captain as you are, sir? Wherefore hold back while still in your prime?"

"Ask the mistress, there," said Richard, as he saw his Susan's white face and trembling fingers, though she kept her eyes on her work to prevent them from betraying their tears and their wistfulness.

"O sweet father," burst forth Humfrey, "do but go, and take me. I am quite old enough."

"Nay, Humfrey, 'tis no matter of liking," said his father, not wishing to prolong his wife's suspense. "Look you here, boy, my Lord Earl is captain of all of his name by right of birth, and so long as he needs my services, I have no right to take them from him. Dost see, my boy?"

Humfrey reluctantly did see. It was a great favour to be thus argued with, and admitted of no reply.

Mrs. Talbot's heart rejoiced, but she was not sorry that it was time for her to carry off Diccon and Ned to their beds, away from the fascinating narrative, and she

would give no respite, though Diccon pleaded hard. In fact, the danger might be the greatest to him, since Humfrey, though born within the smell of the sea, might be retained by the call of duty like his father. To Cis, at least, she thought the sailor's conversation could do no harm, little foreboding the words that presently ensued. "And, sir, what befell the babe we found in our last voyage off the Spurn? It would methinks be about the age of this pretty mistress."

Richard Talbot endeavoured to telegraph a look both of assent and warning, but though Master Goatley would have been sharp to detect the least token of a Spanish galleon on the most distant horizon, the signal fell utterly short. "Ay, sir. What, is it so? Bless me! The very maiden! And you have bred her up for your own."

"Sir! Father!" cried Cis, looking from one to the other, with eyes and mouth wide open.

"Soh!" cried the sailor, "what have I done? I beg your pardon, sir, if I have overhauled what should have been let alone. But," continued the honest, but tactless man, "who could have thought of the like of that, and that the pretty maid never knew it? Ay, ay, dear heart. Never fear but that the captain will be good father to you all the same."

For Richard Talbot had held out his arm, and, as Cis ran up to him, he had seated her on his knee, and held her close to him. Humfrey likewise started up with an impulse to contradict, which was suddenly cut short by a strange flash of memory, so all he did was to come up to his father, and grasp one of the girl's hands as fast as he could. She trembled and shivered, but there was something in the presence of this strange man which choked back all

inquiry, and the silence, the vehement grasp, and the shuddering, alarmed the captain, lest she might suddenly go off into a fit upon his hands.

"This is gear for mother," said he, and taking her up like a baby, carried her off, followed closely by Humfrey. He met Susan coming down, asking anxiously, "Is she sick?"

"I hope not, mother," he said, "but honest Goatley, thinking no harm, hath blurted out that which we had never meant her to know, at least not yet awhile, and it hath wrought strangely with her."

"Then it is true, father?" said Humfrey, in rather an awe-stricken voice, while Cis still buried her face on the captain's breast.

"Yes," he said, "yea, my children, it is true that God sent us a daughter from the sea and the wreck when He had taken our own little maid to His rest. But we have ever loved our Cis as well, and hope ever to do so while she is our good child. Take her, mother, and tell the children how it befell; if I go not down, the fellow will spread it all over the house, and happily none were present save Humfrey and the little maiden."

Susan put the child down on her own bed, and there, with Humfrey standing by, told the history of the father carrying in the little shipwrecked babe. They both listened with eyes devouring her, but they were as yet too young to ask questions about evidences, and Susan did not volunteer these, only when the girl asked, "Then, have I no name?" she answered, "A godly minister, Master Heatherthwayte, gave thee the name of Cicely when he christened thee."

"I marvel who I am?" said Cis, gazing round her, as if the world were all new to her.

"It does not matter," said Humfrey, "you are just the same to us, is she not, mother?"

"She is our dear Heaven-sent child," said the mother tenderly.

"But thou art not my true mother, nor Humfrey nor Diccon my brethren," she said, stretching out her hands like one in the dark.

"If I'm not your brother, Cis, I'll be your husband, and then you will have a real right to be called Talbot. That's better than if you were my sister, for then you would go away, I don't know where, and now you will always be mine—mine—mine very own."

And as he gave Cis a hug in assurance of his intentions, his father, who was uneasy about the matter, looked in again, and as Susan, with tears in her eyes, pointed to the children, the good man said, "By my faith, the boy has found the way to cut the knot — or rather to tie it. What say you, dame? If we do not get a portion for him, we do not have to give one with her, so it is as broad as it is long, and she remains our dear child. Only listen, children, you are both old enough to keep a secret. Not one word of all this matter is to be breathed to any soul till I bid you."

"Not to Diccon," said Humfrey decidedly.

"Nor to Antony?" asked Cis wistfully.

"To Antony? No, indeed! What has he to do with it? Now, to your beds, children, and forget all about this tale."

"There, Humfrey," broke out Cis, as soon as they were alone together, "Huckstress Tibbott *is* a wise woman, whatever thou mayest say."

"How?" said Humfrey.

"Mindst thou not the day when I crossed her hand with the tester father gave me?"

"When mother whipped thee for listening to fortune-tellers, and wasting thy substance. Ay, I mind it well," said Humfrey, "and how thou didst stand simpering at her pack of lies, ere mother made thee sing another tune."

"Nay, Humfrey, they were no lies, though I thought them so then. She said I was not what I seemed, and that the Talbots' kennel would not always hold one of the noble northern eagles. So Humfrey, sweet Humfrey, thou must not make too sure of wedding me."

"I'll wed thee though all the lying old gipsy-wives in England wore their false throats out in screeching out that I shall not," cried Humfrey.

"But she must have known," said Cis, in an awe-struck voice; "the spirits must have spoken with her, and said that I am none of the Talbots."

"Hath mother heard this?" asked Humfrey, recoiling a little, but never thinking of the more plausible explanation.

"Oh no, no! tell her not, Humfrey, tell her not. She said she would whip me again if ever I talked again of the follies that the fortune-telling woman had gulled me with, for if they were not deceits, they were worse. And, thou seest, they are worse, Humfrey!"

With which awe-stricken conclusion the children went off to bed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BEWITCHED WHISTLE.

A CHILD'S point of view is so different from that of a grown person, that the discovery did not make half so much difference to Cis as her adopted parents expected. In fact it was like a dream to her. She found her daily life and her surroundings the same, and her chief interest was—at least apparently—how soon she could escape from psalter and seam, to play with little Ned, and look out for the elder boys returning, or watch for the Scottish Queen taking her daily ride. Once, prompted by Antony, Cis had made a beautiful nosegay of lilies and held it up to the Queen when she rode in at the gate on her return from Buxton. She had been rewarded by the sweetest of smiles, but Captain Talbot had said it must never happen again, or he should be accused of letting billets pass in posies. The whole place was pervaded, in fact, by an atmosphere of suspicion, and the vigilance, which might have been endurable for a few months, was wearing the spirits and temper of all concerned, now that it had already lasted for seven or eight years, and there seemed no end to it. Moreover, in spite of all care, it every now and then became apparent that Queen Mary had some communication with the outer

world which no one could trace, though the effects endangered the life of Queen Elizabeth, the peace of the kingdom, and the existence of the English Church. The blame always fell upon Lord Shrewsbury; and who could wonder that he was becoming captiously suspicious, and soured in temper, so that even such faithful kinsmen as Richard Talbot could sometimes hardly bear with him, and became punctiliously anxious that there should not be the smallest loophole for censure of the conduct of himself and his family?

The person on whom Master Goatley's visit had left the most impression seemed to be Humfrey. On the one hand, his father's words had made him enter into his situation of trust and loyalty, and perceive something of the constant sacrifice of self to duty that it required, and, on the other hand, he had assumed a position towards Cis of which he in some degree felt the force. There was nothing in the opinions of the time to render their semi-betrothal ridiculous. At the Manor-house itself, Gilbert Talbot and Mary Cavendish had been married when no older than he was; half their contemporaries were already plighted, and the only difference was that in the present harassing state of surveillance in which every one lived, the parents thought that to avow the secret so long kept might bring about inquiry and suspicion, and they therefore wished it to be guarded till the marriage could be contracted. As Cis developed, she had looks and tones which so curiously harmonised, now with the Scotch, now with the French element in the royal captive's suite, and which made Captain Richard believe that she must belong to some of the families who seemed amphibious between the two courts; and her identification as a Seaton, a Flemyng, a Beatoun, or as a mem-

ber of any of the families attached to the losing cause, would only involve her in exile and disgrace. Besides, there was every reason to think her an orphan, and a distant kinsman was scarcely likely to give her such a home as she had at Bridgefield, where she had always been looked on as a daughter, and was now regarded as doubly their own in right of their son. So Humfrey was permitted to consider her as peculiarly his own, and he exerted this right of property by a certain jealousy of Antony Babington which amused his parents, and teased the young lady. Nor was he wholly actuated by the jealousy of proprietorship, for he knew the devotion with which Antony regarded Queen Mary, and did not wholly trust him. His sense of honour and duty to his father's trust was one thing, Antony's knight-errantry to the beautiful captive was another; each boy thought himself strictly honourable, while they moved in parallel lines and could not understand one another; yet, with the reserve of childhood, all that passed between them was a secret, till one afternoon when loud angry sounds and suppressed sobs attracted Mistress Susan to the garden, where she found Cis crying bitterly, and little Diccon staring eagerly, while a pitched battle was going on between her eldest son and young Antony Babington, who were pommelling each other too furiously to perceive her approach.

"Boys! boys! fie for shame," she cried, with a hand on the shoulder of each, and they stood apart at her touch, though still fiercely looking at one another.

"See what spectacles you have made of yourselves!" she continued. "Is this your treatment of your guest, Humfrey? How is my Lord's page to show himself at

Chatsworth to-morrow with such an eye? What is it all about?"

Both combatants eyed each other in sullen silence.

"Tell me, Cis. Tell me, Diccon. I will know, or you shall have the rod as well as Humfrey."

Diccon, who was still in the era of timidity, instead of secretiveness, spoke out. "He," indicating his brother, "wanted the packet."

"What packet?" exclaimed the mother, alarmed.

"The packet that *he* (another nod towards Antony) wanted Cis to give that witch in case she came while he is at Chatsworth."

"It was the dog-whistle," said Cis. "It hath no sound in it, and Antony would have me change it for him, because Huckster Tibbott may not come within the gates. I did not want to do so; I fear Tibbott, and when Humfrey found me crying he fell on Antony. So blame him not, mother."

"If Humfrey is a jealous churl, and Cis a little fool, there's no help for it," said Antony, disdainfully turning his back on his late adversary.

"Then let me take charge of this whistle," returned the lady, moved by the universal habit of caution, but Antony sprang hastily to intercept her as she was taking from the little girl a small paper packet tied round with coloured yarn, but he was not in time, and could only exclaim, "Nay, nay, madam, I will not trouble you. It is nothing."

"Master Babington," said Susan firmly, "you know as well as I do that no packet may pass out of the park unopened. If you wished to have the whistle changed you should have brought it uncovered. I am sorry for the discourtesy, and ask your pardon, but this parcel may not pass."

"Then," said Antony, with difficulty repressing something much more passionate and disrespectful, "let me have it again."

"Nay, Master Babington, that would not suit with my duty."

The boy altogether lost his temper. "Duty! duty!" he cried. "I am sick of the word. All it means is a mere feigned excuse for prying and spying, and besetting the most beautiful and unhappy princess in the world for her true faith and true right!"

"Master Antony Babington," said Susan gravely, "you had better take care what you are about. If those words of yours had been spoken in my Lord's hearing, they would bring you worse than the rod or bread and water."

"What care I what I suffer for such a Queen?" exclaimed Antony.

"Suffering is a different matter from saying 'What care I,'" returned the lady, "as I fear you will learn, Master Antony."

"O mother! sweet mother," said Cis, "you will not tell of him!"—but mother shook her head.

"Prithee, dear mother," added Humfrey, seeing no relenting in her countenance, "I did but mean to hinder Cis from being maltreated and a go-between in this traffic with an old witch, not to bring Tony into trouble."

"His face is a tell-tale, Humfrey," said Susan. "I meant ere now to have put a piece of beef on it. Come in, Antony, and let me wash it."

"Thank you, madam, I need nothing here," said Antony, stalking proudly off; while Humfrey, exclaiming "Don't be an ass, Tony!—Mother, no one would care to ask what we had given one another black eyes for in a friendly way," tried to hold him back, and he

did linger when Cis added her persuasions to him not to return the spectacle he was at present.

"If this lady will promise not to betray an unfortunate Queen," he said, as if permission to deal with his bruises were a great reward.

"Oh! you foolish boy!" exclaimed Mistress Talbot, "you were never meant for a plotter! you have yourself betrayed that you are her messenger."

"And I am not ashamed of it," said Antony, holding his head high. "Madam, madam, if you have surprised this from me, you are the more bound not to betray her. Think, lady, if you were shut up from your children and friends, would you not seek to send tidings to them?"

"Child, child! Heaven knows I am not blaming the poor lady within there. I am only thinking what is right."

"Well," said Antony, somewhat hopefully, "if that be all, give me back the packet, or tear it up, if you will, and there can be no harm done."

"Oh, do so, sweet mother," entreated Cis, earnestly; "he will never bid me go to Tibbott again."

"Ay," said Humfrey, "then no tales will be told."

For even he, with all his trustworthiness, or indeed because of it, could not bear to bring a comrade to disgrace; but the dilemma was put an end to by the sudden appearance on the scene of Captain Richard himself, demanding the cause of the disturbance, and whether his sons had been misbehaving to their guest.

"Dear sir, sweet father, do not ask," entreated Cis, springing to him, and taking his hand, as she was privileged to do; "mother has come, and it is all made up and over now."

Richard Talbot, however, had seen the packet

which his wife was holding, and her anxious, perplexed countenance, and the perilous atmosphere of suspicion around him made it incumbent on him to turn to her and say, "What means this, mother? Is it as Cis would have me believe, a mere childish quarrel that I may pass over? or what is this packet?"

"Master Babington saith it is a dog-whistle which he was leaving in charge with Cis to exchange for another with Huckstress Tibbott," she answered.

"Feel,—nay, open it, and see if it be not, sir," cried Antony.

"I doubt not that so it is," said the captain; "but you know, Master Babington, that it is the duty of all here in charge to let no packet pass the gate which has not been viewed by my lord's officers."

"Then, sir, I will take it back again," said Antony, with a vain attempt at making his brow frank and clear.

Instead of answering, Captain Talbot took the knife from his girdle, and cut in twain the yarn that bound the packet. There was no doubt about the whistle being there, nor was there anything written on the wrapper; but perhaps the anxiety in Antony's eye, or even the old association with boatswains, incited Mr. Talbot to put the whistle to his lips. Not a sound would come forth. He looked in, and saw what led him to blow with all his force, when a white roll of paper protruded, and on another blast fell out into his hand.

He held it up as he found it, and looked full at Antony, who exclaimed in much agitation, "To keep out the dust. Only to keep out the dust. It is all gibberish—from my old writing-books."

"That will we see," said Richard very gravely.

"Mistress, be pleased to give this young gentleman some water to wash his face, and attend to his bruises, keeping him in the guest-chamber without speech from any one until I return. Master Babington, I counsel you to submit quietly. I wish, and my Lord will wish, to spare his ward as much scandal as possible, and if this be what you say it is, mere gibberish from your exercise-books, you will be quit for chastisement for a forbidden act, which has brought you into suspicion. If not, it must be as my Lord thinks good."

Antony made no entreaties. Perhaps he trusted that what was unintelligible to himself might pass for gibberish with others; perhaps the headache caused by Humfrey's fists was assisting to produce a state of sullen indifference after his burst of eager chivalry; at any rate he let Mistress Talbot lead him away without resistance. The other children would have followed, but their father detained them to hear the particulars of the commission and the capture. Richard desired to know from his son whether he had any reason for suspecting underhand measures; and when Humfrey looked down and hesitated, added, "On your obedience, boy; this is no slight matter."

"You will not beat Cis, father?" said Humfrey.

"Wherefore should I beat her, save for doing errands that yonder lad should have known better than to thrust on her?"

"Nay, sir, 'tis not for that; but my mother said she should be beaten if ever she spake of the fortune yonder Tibbott told her, and we are sure that she—Tibbott I mean—is a witch, and knows more than she ought."

"What mean'st thou? Tell me, children;" and Cis, nothing loath, since she was secured from the

beating, related the augury which had left so deep an impression on her, Humfrey bearing witness that it was before they knew themselves of Cicely's history.

"But that is not all," added Cicely, seeing Mr. Talbot less impressed than she expected by these supernatural powers of divination. "She can change from a woman to a man!"

"In sooth!" exclaimed Richard, startled enough by this information.

"Yea, father," said Cicely, "Faithful Ekins, the carrier's boy, saw her, in doublet and hose, and a tawny cloak, going along the road to Chesterfield. He knew her by the halt in her left leg."

"Ha!" said Richard, "and how long hast thou known this?"

"Only yestermorn," said Cis; "it was that which made me so much afraid to have any dealings with her."

"She shall trouble thee no more, my little wench," said Richard in a tone that made Humfrey cry out joyously,

"O father! sweet father! wilt thou duck her for a witch? Sink or swim! that will be rare!"

"Hush, hush! foolish lad," said Richard, "and thou, Cicely, take good heed that not a word of all this gets abroad. Go to thy mother, child,—nay, I am not wroth with thee, little one. Thou hast not done amiss, but bear in mind that nought is ever taken out of the park without knowledge of me or of thy mother."

CHAPTER VII.

THE BLAST OF THE WHISTLE

Richard Talbot was of course convinced that witchcraft was not likely to be the most serious part of the misdeeds of Tibbott the huckstress. Committing Antony Babington to the custody of his wife, he sped on his way back to the Manor-house, where Lord Shrewsbury was at present residing, the Countess being gone to view her buildings at Chatsworth, taking her daughter Bessie with her. He sent in a message desiring to speak to my lord in his privy chamber.

Francis Talbot came to him. "Is it matter of great moment, Dick?" he said, "for my father is so fretted and chafed, I would fain not vex him further to-night. —What! know you not? Here are tidings that my lady hath married Bess—yes, Bess Cavendish, in secret to my young Lord Lennox, the brother of this Queen's unlucky husband! How he is to clear himself before her Grace of being concerned in it, I know not, for though Heaven wots that he is as innocent as the child unborn, she will suspect him!"

"I knew she flew high for Mistress Bess," returned Richard.

"High! nothing would serve her save royal blood!

My poor father says as sure as the lions and *fleur-de-lis* have come into a family, the headsman's axe has come after them."

"However it is not our family."

"So I tell him, but it gives him small comfort," said Frank, "looking as he doth on the Cavendish brood as his own, and knowing that there will be a mighty coil at once with my lady and these two queens. He is sore vexed to-night, and saith that never was Earl, not to say man, so baited by woman as he, and he bade me see whether yours be a matter of such moment that it may not wait till morning or be despatched by me."

"That is for you to say, Master Francis. What think you of this for a toy?" as he produced the parcel with the whistle and its contents. "I went home betimes to-day, as you know, and found my boy Humfrey had just made young Master Babington taste of his fists for trying to make our little wench pass this packet to yonder huckster-woman who was succoured some months back by the Queen of Scots."

Francis Talbot silently took the whistle and unrolled the long narrow strip of paper. "This is the cipher," said he, "the cipher used in corresponding with her French kin; Phillipps the decipherer showed me the trick of it when he was at Tutbury in the time of the Duke of Norfolk's business. Soh! your son hath done good service, Richard. That lad hath been tampered with then, I thought he was over thick with the lady in the lodge. Where is he, the young traitor?"

"At Bridgefield, under my wife's ward, having his bruises attended to. I would not bring him up here till I knew what my Lord would have done with him. He

is but a child, and no doubt was wrought with by sweet looks, and I trust my Lord will not be hard with him."

"If my father had hearkened to me, he should never have been here," said Francis. "His father was an honest man, but his mother was, I find, a secret recusant, and when she died, young Antony was quite old enough to have sucked in the poison. You did well to keep him, Richard; he ought not to return hither again, either in ward or at liberty."

"If he were mine, I would send him to school," said Richard, "where the masters and the lads would soon drive out of him all dreams about captive princesses and seminary priests to boot. For, Cousin Francis, I would have you to know that my children say there is a rumour that this woman Tibbott the huckstress hath been seen in a doublet and hose near Chesterfield."

"The villain! When is she looked for here again?"

"Anon, I should suppose, judging by the boy leaving this charge with Cis in case she should come while he is gone to Chatsworth."

"We will take order as to that," said Francis, compressing his lips; "I know you will take heed, cousin, that she, or he, gets no breath of warning. I should not wonder if it were Parsons himself!" and he unfolded the scroll with the air of a man seeking to confirm his triumph.

"Can you make anything of it?" asked Richard, struck by its resemblance to another scroll laid up among his wife's treasures.

"I cannot tell, they are not matters to be read in an hour," said Francis Talbot, "moreover, there is one in use for the English traitors, her friends, and another for the French. This looks like the French sort. Let

me see, they are read by taking the third letter in each second word." Francis Talbot, somewhat proud of his proficiency, and perfectly certain of the trustworthiness of his cousin Richard, went on puzzling out the ciphered letters, making Richard set each letter down as he picked it out, and trying whether they would make sense in French or English. Both understood French, having learned it in their page days, and kept it up by intercourse with the French suite. Francis, however, had to try two or three methods, which, being a young man, perhaps he was pleased to display, and at last he hit upon the right, which interpreted the apparent gibberish of the scroll—excepting that the names of persons were concealed under soubriquets which Francis Talbot could not always understand—but the following sentence by and by became clear:—"*Quand le matelot vient des marais, un feu peut eclater dans la meute et dans la melée*"—"When the sailor lands from the fens, a fire might easily break out in the dog-kennel, and in the confusion" (name could not be read) "could carry off the tercel gentle."

"*La meute*," said Francis, "that is their term for the home of us Talbots, and the sailor in the fens is this Don John of Austria, who means, after conquering the Dutchmen, to come and set free this tercel gentle, as she calls herself, and play the inquisitor upon us. On my honour, Dick, your boy has played the man in making this discovery. Keep the young traitor fast, and take down a couple of yeomen to lay hands on this same Tibbott as she calls herself."

"If I remember right," said Richard, "she was said to be the sister or aunt to one of the grooms or prickers."

"So it was, Guy Norman, methinks. Belike he was the very fellow to set fire to our kennel. Yea, we must secure him. I'll see to that, and you shall lay this scroll before my father meantime, Dick. Why, to fall on such a trail will restore his spirits, and win back her Grace to believe in his honesty, if my lady's tricks should have made her doubtful."

Off went Francis with great alacrity, and ere long the Earl was present with Richard. The long light beard was now tinged with gray, and there were deep lines round the mouth and temples, betraying how the long anxiety was telling on him, and rendering him suspicious and querulous. "Soh! Richard Talbot," was his salutation, "what's the coil now? Can a man never be left in peace in his own house, between queens and ladies, plots and follies, but his own kinsfolk and retainers must come to him on every petty broil among the lads! I should have thought your boy and young Babington might fight out their quarrels alone without vexing a man that is near driven distracted as it is."

"I grieve to vex your lordship," said Richard, standing bareheaded, "but Master Francis thought this scroll worthy of your attention. This is the manner in which he deciphered it."

"Scrolls, I am sick of scrolls," said the Earl testily. "What! is it some order for saying mass,—or to get some new Popish image or a skein of silk? I wear my eyes out reading such as that, and racking my brains for some hidden meaning!"

And falling on Francis's first attempt at copying, he was scornful of the whole, and had nearly thrown the matter aside, but when he lit at last on the sentence about burning the *meute* and carrying off the

tercel gentle, his brow grew dark indeed, and his inquiries came thickly one upon the other, both as to Antony Babington and the huckstering woman.

In the midst, Frank Talbot returned with the tidings that the pricker Guy Norman was nowhere to be found. He had last been seen by his comrades about the time that Captain Richard had returned to the Manor-house. Probably he had taken alarm on seeing him come back at that unusual hour, and had gone to carry the warning to his supposed aunt. This last intelligence made the Earl decide on going down at once to Bridgefield to examine young Babington before there was time to miss his presence at the lodge, or to hold any communication with him. Frank caused horses to be brought round, and the Earl rode down with Richard by a shaded alley in an ordinary cloak and hat.

My Lord's appearance at Bridgefield was a rarer and more awful event than was my Lady's, and if Mistress Susan had been warned beforehand, there is no saying how at the head of her men and maids she would have scrubbed and polished the floors, and brushed the hangings and cushions. What then were her feelings when the rider, who dismounted from his little hackney as unpretendingly as did her husband in the twilight court, proved to have my Lord's long beard and narrow face!

Curtseying her lowest, and with a feeling of consternation and pity as she thought of the orphan boy, she accepted his greeting with duteous welcome as he said, "Kinswoman, I am come to cumber you, whilst I inquire into this matter. I give your son thanks for the honesty and faithfulness he hath shown in the matter, as befitted his father's son. I should wish myself to examine the springald."

Humfrey was accordingly called, and, privately admonished by his father that he must not allow any scruples about bringing his playmate into trouble to lead him to withhold his evidence, or shrink from telling the whole truth as he knew it, Humfrey accordingly stood before the Earl and made his replies a little sullenly but quite straightforwardly. He had prevented the whistle from being given to his sister for the huckstress because the woman was a witch, who frightened her, and moreover he knew it was against rules. Did he suspect that the whistle came from the Queen of Scots ?

He looked startled, and asked if it were so indeed, and when again commanded to say why he had thought it possible, he replied that he knew Antony thought the Queen of Scots a fair and gracious lady.

Did he believe that Antony ever had communication with her or her people unheard by others ?

"Assuredly ! Wherefore not, when he carried my Lady Countess's messages ?"

Lord Shrewsbury bent his brow, but did not further pursue this branch of the subject, but demanded of Humfrey a description of Tibbott, huckster or witch, man or woman.

"She wears a big black hood and muffler," said Humfrey, "and hath a long hooked stick."

"I asked thee not of her muffler, boy, but of her person."

"She hath pouncet boxes and hawks' bells, and dog-whistles in her basket," proceeded Humfrey, but as the Earl waxed impatient, and demanded whether no one could give him a clearer account, Richard bade Humfrey call his mother.

She, however, could say nothing as to the woman's

appearance. She had gone to Norman's cottage to offer her services after the supposed accident, but had been told that the potticary of the Queen of Scots had undertaken her cure, and had only seen her huddled up in a heap of rags, asleep. Since her recovery the woman had been several times at Bridgefield, but it had struck the mistress of the house that there was a certain avoidance of direct communication with her, and a preference for the servants and children. This Susan had ascribed to fear that she should be warned off for her fortune-telling propensities, or the children's little bargains interfered with. All she could answer for was that she had once seen a huge pair of grizzled eyebrows, with light eyes under them, and that the woman, if woman she were, was tall, and bent a good deal upon a hooked stick, which supported her limping steps. Cicely could say little more, except that the witch had a deep awesome voice, like a man, and a long nose terrible to look at. Indeed, there seemed to have been a sort of awful fascination about her to all the children, who feared her yet ran after her.

Antony was then sent for. It was not easy to judge of the expression of his disfigured countenance, but when thus brought to bay he threw off all tokens of compunction, and stood boldly before the Earl.

"So, Master Babington, I find you have been betraying the trust I placed in you——"

"What trust, my Lord?" said Antony, his bright blue eyes looking back into those of the nobleman.

"The cockerel crows loud," said the Earl. "What trust, quotha! Is there no trust implied in the coming and going of one of my household, when such a charge is committed to me and mine?"

"No one ever gave me any charge," said Antony.

"Dost thou bandy words, thou froward imp?" said the Earl. "Thou hast not the conscience to deny that there was no honesty in smuggling forth a letter thus hidden. Deny it not. The treasonable cipher hath been read!"

"I knew nought of what was in it," said the boy.

"I believe thee there, but thou didst know that it was foully disloyal to me and to her Majesty to bear forth secret letters to disguised traitors. I am willing to believe that the smooth tongue which hath deluded many a better man than thou hath led thee astray, and I am willing to deal as lightly with thee as may be, so thou wilt tell me openly all thou knowest of this infamous plot."

"I know of no plot, sir."

"They would scarce commit the knowledge to the like of him," said Richard Talbot.

"May be not," said Lord Shrewsbury, looking at him with a glance that Antony thought contemptuous, and which prompted him to exclaim, "And if I did know of one, you may be assured I would never betray it were I torn with wild horses."

"Betray, sayest thou!" returned the Earl. "Thou hast betrayed my confidence, Antony, and hast gone as far as in thee lies to betray thy Queen."

"My Queen is Mary, the lawful Queen of us all," replied Antony, boldly.

"Ho! Sayest thou so? It is then as thou didst trow, cousin, the foolish lad hath been tampered with by the honeyed tongue. I need not ask thee from whom thou hadst this letter, boy. We have read it and know the foul treason therein. Thou wilt never return to the castle again, but for thy father's sake thou shalt be dealt with less sternly, if thou wilt tell who this

woman is, and how many of these toys thou hast given to her, if thou knowest who she is."

But Antony closed his lips resolutely. In fact, Richard suspected him of being somewhat flattered by being the cause of such a commotion, and actually accused of so grand and manly a crime as high treason. The Earl could extract no word, and finally sentenced him to remain at Bridgefield, shut up in his own chamber till he could be dealt with. The lad walked away in a dignified manner, and the Earl, holding up his hands, half amused, half vexed, said, "So the spell is on that poor lad likewise. What shall I do with him? An orphan boy too, and mine old friend's son."

"With your favour, my Lord," said Richard, "I should say, send him to a grammar school, where among lads of his own age, the dreams about captive princesses might be driven from him by hard blows and merry games."

"That may scarce serve," said the Earl rather severely, for public schools were then held beneath the dignity of both the nobility and higher gentry. "I may, however, send him to study at Cambridge under some trusty pedagogue. Back at the castle I cannot have him, so must I cumber you with him, my good kinswoman, until his face have recovered your son's lusty chastisement. Also it may be well to keep him here till we can lay hands on this same huckster-woman, since there may be need to confront him with her. It were best if you did scour the country toward Chesterfield for her, while Frank went to York."

Having thus issued his orders, the Earl took a gracious leave of the lady, mounted his horse, and rode back to Sheffield, dispensing with the attendance of his kinsman, who had indeed to prepare for an early

start the next morning, when he meant to take Humfrey with him, as not unlikely to recognise the woman, though he could not describe her.

"The boy merits well to go forth with me," said he. "He hath done yeoman's service, and proved himself staunch and faithful."

"Was there matter in that scroll?" asked Susan.

"Only such slight matter as burning down the Talbots' kennel, while Don John of Austria is landing on the coast."

"God forgive them, and defend us!" sighed Susan, turning pale. "Was that in the cipher?"

"Ay, in sooth, but fear not, good wife. Much is purposed that ne'er comes to pass. I doubt me if the ship be built that is to carry the Don hither."

"I trust that Antony knew not of the wickedness?"

"Not he. His is only a dream out of the romances the lads love so well, of beauteous princesses to be freed, and the like."

"But the woman!"

"Yea, that lies deeper. What didst thou say of her? Wherefore do the children call her a witch? Is it only that she is grim and ugly?"

"I trow there is more cause than that," said Susan. "It may be that I should have taken more heed to their babble at first; but I have questioned Cis while you were at the lodge, and I find that even before Mate Goatley spake here, this Tibbott had told the child of her being of lofty race in the north, alien to the Talbots' kennel, holding out to her presages of some princely destiny."

"That bodeth ill!" said Richard, thoughtfully. "Wife, my soul misgives me that the hand of Cuthbert Langston is in this."

Susan started. The idea chimed in with Tibbott's avoidance of her scrutiny, and also with a certain vague sense she had had of having seen those eyes before. So light-complexioned a man would be easily disguised, and the halt was accounted for by a report that he had had a bad fall when riding to join in the Rising in the North. Nor could there now be any doubt that he was an ardent partisan of the imprisoned Mary, while Richard had always known his inclination to intrigue. She could only agree with her husband's opinion, and ask what he would do.

"My duty must be done, kin or no kin," said Richard, "that is if I find him; but I look not to do that, since Norman is no doubt off to warn him."

"I marvel whether he hath really learnt who our Cis can be?"

"Belike not! The hint would only have been thrown out to gain power over her."

"Said you that you read the cipher?"

"Master Frank did so."

"Would it serve you to read our scroll?"

"Ah, woman! woman! Why can thy kind never let well alone? I have sufficient on my hands without reading of scrolls!"

Humfrey's delight was extreme when he found that he was to ride forth with his father, and half-a-dozen of the earl's yeomen, in search of the supposed witch. They traced her as far as Chesterfield; but having met the carrier's waggon on the way, they carefully examined Faithful Ekins on his report, but all the youth was clear about was the halt and the orange tawny cloak, and after entering Chesterfield, no one knew anything of these tokens. There was a large village belonging to a family of recusants, not far off,

where the pursuers generally did lose sight of suspicious persons; and, perhaps, Richard was relieved, though his son was greatly chagrined.

The good captain had a sufficient regard for his kinsman to be unwilling to have to unmask him as a traitor, and to be glad that he should have effected an escape, so that, at least, it should be others who should detect him—if Langston indeed it were.

His next charge was to escort young Babington to Cambridge, and deliver him up to a tutor of his lordship's selection, who might draw the Popish fancies out of him.

Meantime, Antony had been kept close to the house and garden, and not allowed any intercourse with any of the young people, save Humfrey, except when the master or mistress of the house was present; but he did not want for occupation, for Master Sniggius came down, and gave him a long chapter of the Book of Proverbs—chiefly upon loyalty, in the Septuagint, to learn by heart, and translate into Latin and English as his Saturday's and Sunday's occupation, under pain of a flogging, which was no light thing from the hands of that redoubted dominie.

Young Babington was half-flattered and half-frightened at the commotion he had excited. "Am I going to the Tower?" he asked, in a low voice, awe-stricken, yet not without a certain ring of self-importance, when he saw his mails brought down, and was bidden to put on his boots and his travelling dress.

And Captain Talbot had a cruel satisfaction in replying, "No, Master Babington; the Tower is not for refractory boys. You are going to your schoolmaster."

But where the school was to be Richard kept an

absolute secret by special desire, in order that no communication should be kept up through any of the household. He was to avoid Chatsworth, and to return as soon as possible to endeavour to trace the supposed huckster-woman at Chesterfield.

When once away from home, he ceased to treat young Babington as a criminal, but rode in a friendly manner with him through lanes and over moors, till the young fellow began to thaw towards him, and even went so far as to volunteer one day that he would not have brought Mistress Cicely into the matter if there had been any other sure way of getting the letter delivered in his absence.

"Ah, boy!" returned Richard, "when once we swerve from the open and direct paths, there is no saying into what tangles we may bring ourselves and others."

Antony winced a little, and said, "Whoever says I lied, lies in *his* throat."

"No one hath said thou wert false in word, but how as to thy deed?"

"Sir," said Antony, "surely when a high emprise and great right is to be done, there is no need to halt over such petty quibbles."

"Master Babington, no great right was ever done through a little wrong. Depend on it, if you cannot aid without a breach of trust, it is the sure sign that it is not the will of God that you should be the one to do it."

Captain Talbot mused whether he should convince or only weary the lad by an argument he had once heard in a sermon, that the force of Satan's temptation to our blessed Lord, when showing Him all the kingdoms of the world, must have been the absolute and immediate vanishing of all kinds of evil, by a voluntary

abdication on the part of the Prince of this world, instead not only of the coming anguish of the strife, but of the long, long, often losing, battle which has been waging ever since. Yet for this great achievement He would not commit the moment's sin. He was just about to begin when Antony broke in, "Then, sir, you do deem it a great wrong?"

"That I leave to wiser heads than mine," returned the sailor. "My duty is to obey my Lord, his duty is to obey her Grace. That is all a plain man needs to see."

"But an if the true Queen be thus mewed up, sir?" asked Antony. Richard was too wise a man to threaten the suggestion down as rank treason, well knowing that thus he should never root it out.

"Look you here, Antony," he said; "who ought to reign is a question of birth, such as neither of us can understand nor judge. But we know thus much, that her Grace, Queen Elizabeth, hath been crowned and anointed and received oaths of fealty as her due, and that is quite enough for any honest man."

"Even when she keeps in durance the Queen, who came as her guest in dire distress?"

"Nay, Master Antony, you are not old enough to remember that the durance began not until the Queen of Scots tried to form a party for herself among the English liegemen. And didst thou know, thou simple lad, what the letter bore, which thou didst carry, and what it would bring on this peaceful land?"

Antony looked a little startled when he heard of the burning of the kennel, but he averred that Don John was a gallant prince.

"I have seen more than one gallant Spaniard under whose power I should grieve to see any friend of mine."

All the rest of the way Richard Talbot entertained the young gentleman with stories of his own voyages and adventures, into which he managed to bring traits of Spanish cruelty and barbarity as shown in the Low Countries, such as, without actually drawing the moral every time, might show what was to be expected if Mary of Scotland and Don John of Austria were to reign over England, armed with the Inquisition.

Antony asked a good many questions, and when he found that the captain had actually been an eye-witness of the state of a country harried by the Spaniards, he seemed a good deal struck.

"I think if I had the training of him I could make a loyal Englishman of him yet," said Richard Talbot to his wife on his return. "But I fear me there is that in his heart and his conscience which will only grow, while yonder sour-faced doctor, with whom I had to leave him at Cambridge, preaches to him of the perdition of Pope and Papists."

"If his mother were indeed a concealed Papist," said Susan, "such sermons will only revolt the poor child."

"Yea, truly. If my Lord wanted to make a plotter and a Papist of the boy he could scarce find a better means. I myself never could away with yonder lady's blandishments. But when he thinks of her in contrast to yonder divine, it would take a stronger head than his not to be led away. The best chance for him is that the stir of the world about him may put captive princesses out of his head."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE KEY OF THE CIPHER.

WHERE is the man who does not persuade himself that when he gratifies his own curiosity he does so for the sake of his womankind? So Richard Talbot, having made his protest, waited two days, but when next he had any leisure moments before him, on a Sunday evening, he said to his wife, "Sue, what hast thou done with that scroll of Cissy's? I trow thou wilt not rest till thou art convinced it is but some lying horoscope or Popish charm."

Susan had in truth been resting in perfect quietness, being extremely busy over her spinning, so as to be ready for the weaver who came round periodically to direct the more artistic portions of domestic work. However, she joyfully produced the scroll from the depths of the casket where she kept her chief treasures, and her spindle often paused in its dance as she watched her husband over it, with his elbows on the table and his hands in his hair, from whence he only removed them now and then to set down a letter or two by way of experiment. She had to be patient, for she heard nothing that night but that he believed it was French, that the father of deceits himself might be puzzled with the thing, and that she might as well ask him

for his head at once as propose his consulting Master Francis.

The next night he unfolded it with many a groan, and would say nothing at all; but he sat up late and waked in early dawn to pore over it again, and on the third day of study he uttered a loud exclamation of dismay, but he ordered Susan off to bed in the midst, and did not utter anything but a perplexed groan or two when he followed her much later.

It was not till the next night that she heard anything, and then, in the darkness, he began, "Susan, thou art a good wife and a discreet woman."

Perhaps her heart leapt as she thought to herself, "At last it is coming, I knew it would!" but she only made some innocent note of attention.

"Thou hast asked no questions, nor tried to pry into this unhappy mystery," he went on.

"I knew you would tell me what was fit for me to hear," she replied.

"Fit! It is fit for no one to hear! Yet I needs must take counsel with thee, and thou hast shown thou canst keep a close mouth so far."

"Concerns it our Cissy, husband?"

"Ay does it. Our Cissy, indeed! What wouldst say, Sue, to hear she was daughter to the lady yonder."

"To the Queen of Scots?"

"Hush! hush!" fairly grasping her to hinder the words from being uttered above her breath.

"And her father?"

"That villain, Bothwell, of course. Poor lassie, she is ill fathered!"

"You may say so. Is it in the scroll?"

"Ay! so far as I can unravel it; but besides the

cipher no doubt much was left for the poor woman to tell that was lost in the wreck."

And he went on to explain that the scroll was a letter to the Abbess of Soissons, who was aunt to Queen Mary, as was well known, since an open correspondence was kept up through the French ambassador. This letter said that "our trusty Alison Hepburn" would tell how in secrecy and distress Queen Mary had given birth to this poor child in Lochleven, and how she had been conveyed across the lake while only a few hours old, after being hastily baptized by the name of Bride, one of the patron saints of Scotland. She had been nursed in a cottage for a few weeks till the Queen had made her first vain attempt to escape, after which Mary had decided on sending her with her nurse to Dumbarton Castle, whence Lord Flemyng would despatch her to France. The Abbess was implored to shelter her, in complete ignorance of her birth, until such time as her mother should resume her liberty and her throne. "Or if," the poor Queen said, "I perish in the hands of my enemies, you will deal with her as my uncles of Guise and Lorraine think fit, since, should her unhappy little brother die in the rude hands of yonder traitors, she may bring the true faith back to both realms."

"Ah!" cried Susan, with a sudden gasp of dismay, as she bethought her that the child was indeed heiress to both realms after the young King of Scots. "But has there been no quest after her? Do they deem her lost?"

"No doubt they do. Either all hands were lost in the *Bride of Dunbar*, or if any of the crew escaped, they would report the loss of nurse and child. The few who know that the little one was born believe her to have perished. None will ever ask for her. They

deem that she has been at the bottom of the sea these twelve years or more."

"And you would still keep the knowledge to ourselves?" asked his wife, in a tone of relief.

"I would I knew it not myself!" sighed Richard. "Would that I could blot it out of my mind."

"It were far happier for the poor maid herself to remain no one's child but ours," said Susan.

"In sooth it is! A drop of royal blood is in these days a mere drop of poison to them that have the ill luck to inherit it. As my lord said the other day, it brings the headsman's axe after it."

"And our boy Humfrey calls himself contracted to her!"

"So long as we let the secret die with us that can do her no ill. Happily the wench favours not her mother, save sometimes in a certain lordly carriage of the head and shoulders. She is like enough to some of the Scots retinue to make me think she must take her face from her father, the villain, who, some one told me, was beetle-browed and swarthy."

"Lives he still?"

"So 'tis thought, but somewhere in prison in the north. There have been no tidings of his death; but my Lady Queen, you'll remember, treats the marriage as nought, and has made offer of herself for the misfortune of the Duke of Norfolk, ay, and of this Don John, and I know not whom besides."

"She would not have done that had she known that our Cis was alive."

"Mayhap she would, mayhap not. I believe myself she would do anything short of disowning her Popery to get out of prison; but as matters stand I doubt me whether Cis——"

"The Lady Bride Hepburn," suggested Susan.

"Pshaw, poor child, I misdoubt me whether they would own her claim even to that name."

"And they might put her in prison if they did," said Susan.

"They would be sure to do so, sooner or later. Here has my lord been recounting in his trouble about my lady's fine match for her Bess, all that hath come of mating with royal blood, the very least disaster being poor Lady Mary Grey's! Kept in ward for life! It is a cruel matter. I would that I had known the cipher at first. Then she might either have been disposed of at the Queen's will, or have been sent safe to this nunnery at Soissons."

"To be bred a Papist! Oh fie, husband!"

"And to breed dissension in the kingdoms!" added her husband. "It is best so far for the poor maiden herself to have thy tender hand over her than that of any queen or abbess of them all."

"Shall we then keep all things as they are, and lock this knowledge in our own hearts?" asked Susan hopefully.

"To that am I mightily inclined," said Richard. "Were it blazed abroad at once, thou and I might be made out guilty of I know not what for concealing it; and as to the maiden, she would either be put in close ward with her mother, or, what would be more likely, had up to court to be watched, and flouted, and spied upon, as were the two poor ladies—sisters to the Lady Jane—ere they made their lot hopeless by marrying. Nay, I have seen those who told me that poor Lady Katherine was scarce worse bested in the Tower than she was while at court."

"My poor Cis! No, no! The only cause for which

I could bear to yield her up would be the thought that she would bring comfort to the heart of the poor captive mother who hath the best right to her."

"Forsooth! I suspect her poor captive mother would scarce be pleased to find this witness to her ill-advised marriage in existence."

"Nor would she be permitted to be with her."

"Assuredly not. Moreover, what could she do with the poor child?"

"Rear her in Popery," exclaimed Susan, to whom the word was terrible.

"Yea, and make her hand secure as the bait to some foreign prince or some English traitor, who would fain overthrow Queen and Church."

Susan shuddered. "Oh yes! let us keep the poor child to ourselves. I *could* not give her up to such a lot as that. And it might imperil you too, my husband. I should like to get up instantly and burn the scroll."

"I doubt me whether that were expedient," said Richard. "Suppose it were in the course of providence that the young King of Scots should not live, then would this maid be the means of uniting the two kingdoms in the true and Reformed faith! Heaven forefend that he should be cut off, but meseemeth that we have no right to destroy the evidence that may one day be a precious thing to the kingdom at large."

"No chance eye could read it even were it discovered?" said Susan.

"No, indeed. Thou knowest how I strove in vain to read it at first, and even now, when Frank Talbot unwittingly gave me the key, it was days before I could fully read it. It will tell no tales, sweet wife, that can prejudice any one, so we will let it be, even with

the baby clouts. So now to sleep, with no more thoughts on the matter."

That was easy to say, but Susan lay awake long, pondering over the wonder, and only slept to dream strange dreams of queens and princesses, ay, and worse, for she finally awoke with a scream, thinking her husband was on the scaffold, and that Humfrey and Cis were walking up the ladder, hand in hand with their necks bared, to follow him!

There was no need to bid her hold her tongue. She regarded the secret with dread and horror, and a sense of something amiss which she could not quite define, though she told herself she was only acting in obedience to her husband, and indeed her judgment went along with his.

Often she looked at the unconscious Cis, studying whether the child's parentage could be detected in her features. But she gave promise of being of larger frame than her mother, who had the fine limbs and contour of her Lorraine ancestry, whereas Cis did, as Richard said, seem to have the sturdy outlines of the Borderer race from whom her father came. She was round-faced too, and sunburnt, with deep gray eyes under black straight brows, capable of frowning heavily. She did not look likely ever to be the fascinating beauty which all declared her mother to be—though those who saw the captive at Sheffield, believed the charm to be more in indefinable grace than in actual features,—in a certain wonderful smile and sparkle, a mixed pathos and archness which seldom failed of its momentary effect, even upon those who most rebelled against it. Poor little Cis, a sturdy girl of twelve or thirteen, playing at ball with little Ned on the terrace, and coming with tardy steps

to her daily task of spinning, had little of the princess about her; and yet when she sat down, and the management of distaff and thread threw her shoulders back, there was something in the poise of her small head and the gesture of her hand that forcibly recalled the Queen. Moreover, all the boys around were at her beck and call, not only Humfrey and poor Antony Babington, but Cavendishes, Pierrepoints, all the young pages and grandsons who dwelt at castle or lodge, and attended Master Sniggius's school. Nay, the dominie himself, though owning that Mistress Cicely promoted idleness and inattention among his pupils, had actually volunteered to come down to Bridgefield twice a week himself to prevent her from forgetting her Lilly's grammar and her Cæsar's Commentaries, an attention with which this young lady would willingly have dispensed.

Stewart, Lorraine, Hepburn, the blood of all combined was a perilous inheritance, and good Susan Talbot's instinct was that the young girl whom she loved truly like her own daughter would need all the more careful and tender watchfulness and training to overcome any tendencies that might descend to her. Pity increased her affection, and even while in ordinary household life it was easy to forget who and what the girl really was, yet Cis was conscious that she was admitted to the intimacy and privileges of an elder daughter, and made a companion and friend, while her contemporaries at the Manor-house were treated as children, and rated roundly, their fingers tapped with fans, their shoulders even whipped, whenever they transgressed. Cis did indeed live under equal restraint, but it was the wise and gentle restraint of firm influence and constant watchfulness, which took from her the wish to resist.

CHAPTER IX.

UNQUIET.

BRIDGEFIELD was a peaceable household, and the castle and manor beyond might envy its calm.

From the time of the marriage of Elizabeth Cavendish with the young Earl of Lennox all the shreds of comfort which had remained to the unfortunate Earl had vanished. First he had to clear himself before Queen Elizabeth from having been a consenting party, and then he found his wife furious with him at his displeasure at her daughter's aggrandisement. Moreover, whereas she had formerly been on terms of friendly gossiphood with the Scottish Queen, she now went over to the Lennox side because her favourite daughter had married among them; and it was evident that from that moment all amity between her and the prisoner was at an end.

She was enraged that her husband would not at once change his whole treatment of the Queen, and treat her as such guilt deserved; and with the illogical dulness of a passionate woman, she utterly scouted and failed to comprehend the argument that the unhappy Mary was, to say the least of it, no more guilty now than when she came into their keeping, and that to alter their demeanour towards her would be unjust and unreasonable.

"My Lady is altogether beyond reason," said Captain Talbot, returning one evening to his wife; "neither my Lord nor her daughter can do ought with her; so puffed up is she with this marriage! Moreover, she is hotly angered that young Babington should have been sent away from her retinue without notice to her, and demands our Humfrey in his stead as a page."

"He is surely too old for a page!" said his mother, thinking of her tall well-grown son of fifteen.

"So said I," returned Richard. "I had sooner it were Diccon, and so I told his lordship."

Before Richard could speak for them, the two boys came in, eager and breathless. "Father!" cried Humfrey, "who think you is at Hull? Why, none other than your old friend and shipmate, Captain Frobisher!"

"Ha! Martin Frobisher! Who told thee, Humfrey?"

"Faithful Ekins, sir, who had it from the Doncaster carrier, who saw Captain Frobisher himself, and was asked by him if you, sir, were not somewhere in Yorkshire, and if so, to let you know that he will be in Hull till May-day, getting men together for a voyage to the northwards, where there is gold to be had for the picking—and if you had a likely son or two, now was the time to make their fortunes, and show them the world. He said, any way you might ride to see an old comrade."

"A long message for two carriers," said Richard Talbot, smiling, "but Martin never was a scribe!"

"But, sir, you will let me go," cried Humfrey, eagerly. "I mean, I pray you to let me go. Dear mother, say nought against it," entreated the youth. "Cis, think of my bringing thee home a gold bracelet like mother's."

"What," said his father, "when my Lady has just craved thee for a page."

"A page!" said Humfrey, with infinite contempt—"to hear all their tales and bickerings, hold skeins of silk, amble mincingly along galleries, be begged to bear messages that may have more in them than one knows, and be noted for a bear if one refuses."

The father and Cis laughed, the mother looked unhappy.

"So Martin is at Hull, is he?" said Richard, musingly. "If my Lord can give me leave for a week or fortnight, methinks I must ride to see the stout old knave."

"And oh, sweet father! prithee take me with you," entreated Humfrey, "if it be only to come back again. I have not seen the sea since we came here, and yet the sound is in my ears as I fall asleep. I entreat of you to let me come, good my father."

"And, good father, let me come," exclaimed Diccon; "I have never even seen the sea!"

"And dear, sweet father, take me," entreated little Ned.

"Nay," cried Cis, "what should I do? Here is Antony Babington borne off to Cambridge, and you all wanting to leave me."

"I'll come home better worth than he!" muttered Humfrey, who thought he saw consent on his father's brow, and drew her aside into the deep window.

"You'll come back a rude sailor, smelling of pitch and tar, and Antony will be a well-bred, point-device scholar, who will know how to give a lady his hand," said the teasing girl.

And so the playful war was carried on, while the father, having silenced and dismissed the two younger

lads, expressed his intention of obtaining leave of absence, if possible, from the Earl."

"Yea," he added to his wife, "I shall even let Humfrey go with me. It is time he looked beyond the walls of this place, which is little better than a prison."

"And will you let him go on this strange voyage?" she asked wistfully, "he, our first-born, and our heir."

"For that, dame, remember his namesake, my poor brother, was the one who stayed at home, I the one to go forth, and here am I now!" The lad's words may have set before thee weightier perils in yonder park than he is like to meet among seals and bears under honest old Martin."

"Yet here he has your guidance," said Susan.

"Who knows how they might play on his honour as to talebearing? Nay, good wife, when thou hast thought it over, thou wilt see that far fouler shoals and straits lie up yonder, than in the free open sea that God Almighty made. Martin is a devout and godly man, who hath matins and evensong on board each day when the weather is not too foul, and looks well that there be no ill-doings in his ship; and if he have a berth for thy lad, it will be a better school for him than where two-thirds of the household are raging against one another, and the third ever striving to corrupt and outwit the rest. I am weary of it all! Would that I could once get into blue water again, and leave it all behind!"

"You will not! Oh! you will not!" implored Susan. "Remember, my dear, good lord, how you said all your duties lay at home."

"I remember, my good housewife. Thou needst not fear for me. But there is little time to spare. If

I am to see mine old friend, I must get speech of my Lord to-night, so as to be on horseback to-morrow. Saddle me Brown Dumpling, boys."

And as the boys went off, persuading Cis, who went coyly protesting that the paddock was damp, yet still following after them, he added, "Yea, Sue, considering all, it is better those two were apart for a year or so, till we see better what is this strange nestling that we have reared. Ay, thou art like the mother sparrow that hath bred up a cuckoo and doteth on it, yet it mateth not with her brood."

"It casteth them out," said Susan, "as thou art doing now, by your leave, husband."

"Only for a flight, gentle mother," he answered, "only for a flight, to prove meanwhile whether there be the making of a simple household bird, or of a hawk that might tear her mate to pieces, in yonder nestling."

Susan was too dutiful a wife to say more, though her motherly heart was wrung almost as much at the implied distrust of her adopted daughter as by the sudden parting with her first-born to the dangers of the northern seas. She could better enter into her husband's fears of the temptations of page life at Sheffield, and being altogether a wife, "bonner and boughsome," as her marriage vow held it, she applied herself and Cis to the choosing of the shirts and the crimping of the ruffs that were to appear in Hull, if, for there was this hope at the bottom of her heart, my Lord might refuse leave of absence to his "gentleman porter."

The hope was fallacious; Richard reported that my Lord was so much relieved to find that he had detected no fresh conspiracy, as to be willing to grant him a fortnight's leave, and even had said with a sigh that

he was in the right on't about his son, for Sheffield was more of a school for plotting than for chivalry.

It was a point of honour with every good housewife to have a store of linen equal to any emergency, and, indeed, as there were no washing days in the winter, the stock of personal body-linen was at all times nearly a sufficient outfit; so the main of Humfrey's shirts were to be despatched by a carrier, in the trust that they would reach him before the expedition should sail.

There was then little to delay the father and son, after the mother, with fast-gathering tears resolutely forced back, had packed and strapped their mails, with Cis's help, Humfrey standing by, booted and spurred, and talking fast of the wonders he should see, and the gold and ivory he should bring home, to hide the qualms of home-sickness, and mother-sickness, he was already beginning to feel; and maybe to get Cis to pronounce that *then* she should think more of him than of Antony Babington with his airs and graces. Wistfully did the lad watch for some such tender assurance, but Cis seemed all provoking brilliancy and teasing. "She knew he would be back over soon. Oh no, *he* would never go to sea! She feared not. Mr. Frobisher would have none of such awkward lubbers. More's the pity. There would be some peace to get to do her broidery, and leave to play on the virginals when he was gone."

But when the horsemen had disappeared down the avenue, Cis hid herself in a corner and cried as if her heart would break.

She cried again behind the back of the tall settle when the father came back alone, full of praises of Captain Frobisher, his ship, and his company, and his

assurances that he would watch over Humfrey like his own son.

Meantime the domestic storms at the park were such that Master Richard and his wife were not sorry that the boy was not growing up in the midst of them, though the Countess rated Susan severely for her ingratitude.

Queen Elizabeth was of course much angered at the Lennox match, and the Earl had to write letter after letter to clear himself from any participation in bringing it about. Queen Mary also wrote to clear herself of it, and to show that she absolutely regretted it, as she had small esteem for Bess Cavendish. Moreover, though Lady Shrewsbury's friendship might not be a very pleasant thing, it was at least better than her hostility. However, she was not much at Sheffield. Not only was she very angry with her husband, but Queen Elizabeth had strictly forbidden the young Lord Lennox from coming under the same roof with his royal sister-in-law. He was a weakly youth, and his wife's health failed immediately after her marriage, so that Lady Shrewsbury remained almost constantly at Chatsworth with her darling.

Gilbert Talbot, who was the chief peacemaker of the family, went to and fro, wrote letters and did his best, which would have been more effective but for Mary, his wife, who, no doubt, detailed all the gossip of Sheffield at Chatsworth, as she certainly amused Sheffield with stories of her sister Bess as a royal countess full of airs and humours, and her mother treating her, if not as a queen, at least on the high road to become one, and how the haughty dame of Shrewsbury ran willingly to pick up her daughter's kerchief, and stood over the fire stirring the posset, rather than let it fail

to tempt the appetite which became more dainty by being cossetted.

The difference made between Lady Lennox and her elder sisters was not a little nettling to Dame Mary Talbot, who held that some consideration was her due, as the proud mother of the only grandson of the house of Shrewsbury, little George, who was just able to be put on horseback in the court, and say he was riding to see "Lady Danmode," and to drink the health of "Lady Danmode" at his meals.

Alas! the little hope of the Talbots suddenly faded. One evening after supper a message came down in haste to beg for the aid of Mistress Susan, who, though much left to the seclusion of Bridgefield in prosperous days, was always a resource in trouble or difficulty. Little George, then two and a half years old, had been taken suddenly ill after a supper on marchpane and plum broth, washed down by Christmas ale. Convulsions had come on, and the skill of Queen Mary's apothecary had only gone so far as to bleed him. Susan arrived only just in time to see the child breathe his last sigh, and to have his mother, wild with tumultuous clamorous grief, put into her hands for such soothing and comforting as might be possible, and the good and tender woman did her best to turn the mother's thoughts to something higher and better than the bewailing at one moment "her pretty boy," with a sort of animal sense of bereavement, and the next with lamentations over the honours to which he would have succeeded. It was of little use to speak to her of the eternal glories of which he was now secure, for Mary Talbot's sorrow was chiefly selfish, and was connected with the loss of her pre-eminence as parent to the heir-male.

However, the grief of those times was apt to expend itself quickly, and when little George's coffin, smothered under heraldic devices and funeral escutcheons, had been bestowed in the family vault, Dame Mary soon revived enough to take a warm interest in the lords who were next afterwards sent down to hold conferences with the captive; and her criticism of the fashion of their ruffs and doublets was as animated as ever. Another grief, however, soon fell upon the family. Lady Lennox's ailments proved to be no such trifles as her sisters and sisters-in-law had been pleased to suppose, and before the year was out, she had passed away from all her ambitious hopes, leaving a little daughter. The Earl took a brief leave of absence to visit his lady in her affliction at Chatsworth, and to stand godfather to the motherless infant.

"She will soon be fatherless, too," said Richard Talbot on his return to Bridgefield, after attending his lord on this expedition. "My young Lord Lennox, poor youth, is far gone in the wasting sickness, as well as distraught with grief, and he could scarcely stand to receive my Lord."

"Our poor lady!" said Susan, "it pities me to think what hopes she had fixed upon that young couple whom she had mated together."

"I doubt me whether her hopes be ended now," quoth Richard. "What think you she hath fixed on as the name of the poor puling babe yonder? They have called her Arbel or Arabella."

"Arabella, say you? I never heard such a name. It is scarce Christian. Is it out of a romaunt?"

"Better that it were. It is out of a pedigree. They have got the whole genealogy of the house of Lennox blazoned fair, with crowns and coronets and coats of

arms hung up in the hall at Chatsworth, going up on the one hand through Sir Æneas of Troy, and on the other hand through Woden to Adam and Eve! Pass for all before the Stewart line became Kings of Scots! Well, it seems that these Lennox Stewarts sprang from one Walter, who was son to King Robert II., and that the mother of this same Walter was called Arnhild, or as the Scots here call it Annaple, but the scholars have made it into Arabella, and so my young lady is to be called. They say it was a special fancy of the young Countess's."

"So I should guess. My lady would fill her head with such thoughts, and of this poor youth being next of kin to the young Scottish king, and to our own Queen."

"He is not next heir to Scotland even, barring a little one we wot of, Dame Sue. The Hamiltons stand between, being descended from a daughter of King James I."

"So methought I had heard. Are they not Papists?"

"Yea! Ah ha, sweetheart, there is another of the house of Hardwicke as fain to dreams of greatness for her child as ever was the Countess, though she may be more discreet in the telling of them."

"Ah me, dear sir, I dreamt not of greatness for splendour's sake—'twere scarce for the dear child's happiness. I only thought of what you once said, that she may be the instrument of preserving the true religion."

"And if so, it can only be at a mighty cost!" said her husband.

"Verily," said Susan, "glad am I that you sent our Humfrey from her. Would that nought had ever passed between the children!"

"They were but children," said Richard; "and there was no contract between them."

"I fear me there was what Humfrey will hold to, or know good reason why," said his mother.

"And were the young King of Scots married and father to a goodly heir, there is no reason he should not hold to it," rejoined Richard.

However Richard was still anxious to keep his son engaged at a distance from Sheffield. There was great rejoicing and thankfulness when one of the many messengers constantly passing between London and Sheffield brought a packet from Humfrey, whose ship had put into the Thames instead of the Humber.

The packet contained one of the black stones which the science of the time expected to transmute into gold, also some Esquimaux trinkets made of bone, and a few shells. These were for the mother and Cis, and there were also the tusks of a sea-elephant which Humfrey would lay up at my Lord's London lodgings till his father sent tidings what should be done with them, and whether he should come home at once by sea to Hull, or if, as he much desired to do, he might join an expedition which was fitting out for the Spanish Main, where he was assured that much more both of gold and honour was to be acquired than in the cold northern seas, where nothing was to be seen for the fog at most times, and when it cleared only pigmies, with their dogs, white bears, and seals, also mountains of ice bigger than any church, blue as my lady's best sapphires, green as her emeralds, sparkling as her diamonds, but ready to be the destruction of the ships.

"One there was," wrote Humfrey, "that I could have thought was no other than the City that the blessed St. John saw descending from Heaven, so fair

was it to look on, but they cried out that it was rather a City of Destruction, and when we had got out of the current where it was bearing down on us, our noble captain piped all hands up to prayers, and gave thanks for our happy deliverance therefrom."

Susan breathed a thanksgiving as her husband read, and he forbore to tell her of the sharks, the tornadoes, and the fevers which might make the tropical seas more perilous than the Arctic. No Elizabethan mariner had any scruples respecting piracy, and so long as the captain was a godly man who kept up strict discipline on board, Master Richard held the quarterdeck to be a much more wholesome place than the Manor-house, and much preferred the humours of the ship to those of any other feminine creature; for, as to his Susan, he always declared that she was the only woman who had none.

So she accepted his decision, and saw the wisdom of it, though her tender heart deeply felt the disappointment. Tenderly she packed up the shirts which she and Cis had finished, and bestrewed them with lavender, which, as she said, while a tear dropped with the gray blossoms, would bring the scent of home to the boy.

Cis affected to be indifferent and offended. "Master Humfrey might do as he chose. She did not care if he did prefer pitch and tar, and whale blubber and grease, to hawks and hounds, and lords and ladies. She was sure she wanted no more great lubberly lads—with a sly cut at Diccon—to tangle her silk, and torment her to bait their hooks. She was well quit of any one of them.

When Diccon proposed that she should write a letter to Humfrey, she declared that she should do no

such thing, since he had never attempted to write to her. In truth Diccon may have made the proposal in order to obtain a companion in misfortune, since Master Sniggius, emulous of the success of other tutors, insisted on his writing to his brother in Latin, and the unfortunate epistle of Ricardus to Onofredus was revised and corrected to the last extremity, and as it was allowed to contain no word unknown to Virgilius Maro, it could not have afforded much delectation to the recipient.

But when Mrs. Susan had bestowed all the shirts as neatly as possible, on returning to settle them for the last time before wrapping them up for the messenger, she felt something hard among them. It was a tiny parcel wrapped in a piece of a fine kerchief, tied round with a tress of dark hair, and within, Susan knew by the feeling, a certain chess rook which had been won by Cis when shooting at the butts a week or two before.

CHAPTER X.

THE LADY ARBELL.

After several weary months of languishing, Charles Stewart was saved from the miseries which seemed the natural inheritance of his name by sinking into his grave. His funeral was conducted with the utmost magnificence, though the Earl of Shrewsbury declined to be present at it, and shortly after, the Countess intimated her purpose of returning to Sheffield, bringing with her the little orphan, Lady Arabella Stewart. Orders came that the best presence chamber in the Manor-house should be prepared, the same indeed where Queen Mary had been quartered before the lodge had been built for her use. The Earl was greatly perturbed. "Whom can she intend to bring?" he went about asking. "If it were the Lady Margaret, it were as much as my head were worth to admit her within the same grounds as this Queen."

"There is no love lost between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law," observed his son Gilbert in a consolatory tone.

"Little good would that do to me, if once it came to the ears of her Grace and the Lord Treasurer that both had been my guests! And if I had to close the gates—though in no other way could I save my life

and honour—your mother would never forget it. It would be cast up to me for ever. What think you, daughter Talbot?"

"Mayhap," said Dame Mary, "my lady mother has had a hint to make ready for her Majesty herself, who hath so often spoken of seeing the Queen of Scots, and might think well to take her unawares."

This was a formidable suggestion. "Say you so," cried the poor Earl, with an alarm his eye would never have betrayed had Parma himself been within a march of Sheffield, "then were we fairly spent. I am an impoverished man, eaten out of house and lands as it is, and were the Queen herself to come, I might take at once to the beggar's bowl."

"But think of the honour, good my lord," cried Mary. "Think of all Hallamshire coming to do her homage. Oh, how I should laugh to hear the Mayor stumbling over his address."

"Laugh, ay," growled the Earl; "and how will you laugh when there is not a deer left in the park, nor an ox in the stalls?"

"Nay, my Lord," interposed Gilbert, "there is no fear of her Majesty's coming. That post from M. de la Mauvissière reported her at Greenwich only five days back, and it would take her Majesty a far longer time to make her progress than yonder fellow, who will tell you himself that she had no thoughts of moving."

"That might only be a feint to be the more sudden with us," said his wife, actuated in part by the diversion of alarming her father-in-law, and in part really fired by the hope of such an effectual enlivenment of the dulness of Sheffield.

They were all in full family conclave drawn up in

the hall for the reception, and Mistress Susan, who could not bear to see the Earl so perplexed and anxious, ventured to say that she was quite sure that my Lady Countess would have sent warning forward if indeed she were bringing home such a guest, and at that moment the blare of trumpets announced that the cavalcade was approaching. The start which the Earl gave showed how much his nerves had become affected by his years of custody. Up the long avenue they came, with all the state with which the Earl had conducted Queen Mary to the lodge before she was absolutely termed a prisoner. Halberdiers led the procession, horse and foot seemed to form it. The home party stood on the top of the steps watching with much anxiety. There was a closed litter visible, beside which Lady Shrewsbury, in a mourning dress and hood, could be seen riding her favourite bay palfrey. No doubt it contained the Lady Margaret, Countess of Lennox; and the unfortunate Earl, forgetting all his stately dignity, stood uneasily moving from leg to leg, and pulling his long beard, torn between the instincts of hospitality and of loyal obedience, between fear of his wife and fear of the Queen.

The litter halted at the foot of the steps, the Earl descended. All he saw was the round face of an infant in its nurse's arms, and he turned to help his wife from the saddle, but she waved him aside. "My son Gilbert will aid me, my Lord," said she, "your *devoir* is to the princess."

Poor Lord Shrewsbury, his apologies on his tongue, looked into the litter, where he saw the well-known and withered countenance of the family nurse. He also beheld a buxom young female, whose dress marked her as a peasant, but before he had time to seek further for

the princess, the tightly rolled chrysalis of a child was thrust into his astonished arms, while the round face puckered up instantly with terror at sight of his bearded countenance, and he was greeted with a loud yell. He looked helplessly round, and his lady was ready at once to relieve him. "My precious! My sweetheart! My jewel! Did he look sour at her and frighten her with his ugsome beard?" and the like endearments common to grandmothers in all ages.

"But where is the princess?"

"Where? Where should she be but here? Her grandame's own precious, royal, queenly little darling!" and as a fresh cry broke out, "Yes, yes; she shall to her presence chamber. Usher her, Gilbert."

"Bess's brat!" muttered Dame Mary, in ineffable disappointment.

Curiosity and the habit of obedience to the Countess carried the entire troop on to the grand apartments on the south side, where Queen Mary had been lodged while the fiction of her guestship had been kept up. Lady Shrewsbury was all the time trying to hush the child, who was quite old enough to be terrified by new faces and new scenes, and who was besides tired and restless in her swaddling bands, for which she was so nearly too old that she had only been kept in them for greater security upon the rough and dangerous roads. Great was my lady's indignation on reaching the state rooms on finding that no nursery preparations had been made, and her daughter Mary, with a giggle hardly repressed by awe of her mother, stood forth and said, "Why, verily, my lady, we expected some great dame, my Lady Margaret or my Lady Hunsdon at the very least, when you spoke of a princess."

"And who should it be but one who has both the

royal blood of England and Scotland in her veins?" You have not saluted the child to whom you have the honour to be akin, Mary! On your knee, minion; I tell you she hath as good or a better chance of wearing a crown as any woman in England."

"She hath a far better chance of a prison," muttered the Earl, "if all this foolery goes on."

"What! What is that? What are you calling these honours to my orphan princess?" cried the lady, but the princess herself here broke in with the lustiest of squalls, and Susan, who was sorry for the child, contrived to insert an entreaty that my lady would permit her to be taken at once to the nursery chamber that had been made ready for her, and let her there be fed, warmed, and undressed at once.

There was something in the quality of Susan's voice to which people listened, and the present necessity overcame the Countess's desire to assert the dignity of her granddaughter, so she marched out of the room attended by the women, while the Earl and his sons were only too glad to slink away—there is no other word for it, their relief as to the expected visitor having been exchanged for consternation of another description.

There was a blazing fire ready, and all the baby comforts of the time provided, and poor little Lady Arbell was relieved from her swathing bands, and allowed to stretch her little limbs on her nurse's lap, the one rest really precious to babes of all periods and conditions—but the troubles were not yet over, for the grandmother, glancing round, demanded, "Where is the cradle inlaid with pearl? Why was it not provided? Bring it here."

Now this cradle, carved in cedar wood and inlaid with mother-of-pearl, had been a sponsor's gift to poor

little George, the first male heir of the Talbots, and it was regarded as a special treasure by his mother, who was both wounded and resentful at the demand, and stood pouting and saying, "It was my son's. It is mine."

"It belongs to the family. You," to two of the servants, "fetch it here instantly!"

The ladies of Hardwicke race were not guarded in temper or language, and Mary burst into passionate tears and exclamations that Bess's brat should not have her lost George's cradle, and flounced away to get before the servants and lock it up. Lady Shrewsbury would have sprung after her, and have made no scruple of using her fists and nails even on her married daughter, but that she was impeded by a heavy table, and this gave time for Susan to throw herself before her, and entreat her to pause.

"You, you, Susan Talbot! You should know better than to take the part of an undutiful, foul-tongued vixen like that. Out of my way, I say!" and as Susan, still on her knees, held the riding-dress, she received a stinging box on the ear. But in her maiden days she had known the weight of my lady's hand, and without relaxing her hold, she only entreated: "Hear me, hear me for a little space, my lady. Did you but know how sore her heart is, and how she loved little Master George!"

"That is no reason she should flout and miscall her dead sister, of whom she was always jealous!"

"O madam, she wept with all her heart for poor Lady Lennox. It is not any evil, but she sets such store by that cradle in which her child died — she keeps it by her bed even now, and her woman told me how, for all she seems gay and blithe by day,

she weeps over it at night, as if her heart would break."

Lady Shrewsbury was a little softened. "The child died in it?" she asked.

"Yea, madam. He had been on his father's knee, and had seemed a little easier, and as if he might sleep, so Sir Gilbert laid him down, and he did but stretch himself out, shiver all over, draw a long breath, and the pretty lamb was gone to Paradise!"

"You saw him, Susan?"

"Yea, madam. Dame Mary sent for me, but none could be of any aid where it was the will of Heaven to take him."

"If I had been there," said the Countess, "I who have brought up eight children and lost none, I should have saved him! So he died in yonder cedar cradle! Well, e'en let Mary keep it. It may be that there is infection in the smell of the cedar wood, and that the child will sleep better out of it. It is too late to do aught this evening, but to-morrow the child shall be lodged as befits her birth, in the presence chamber."

"Ah, madam!" said Susan, "would it be well for the sweet babe if her Majesty's messengers, who be so often at the castle, were to report her so lodged?"

"I have a right to lodge my grandchild where and how I please in my own house."

"Yea, madam, that is most true, but you wot how the Queen treats all who may have any claim to the throne in future times; and were it reported by any of the spies that are ever about us, how royal honours were paid to the little Lady Arbell, might she not be taken from your ladyship's wardship, and bestowed with those who would not show her such loving care?"

The Countess would not show whether this had

any effect on her, or else some sound made by the child attracted her. It was a puny little thing, and she had a true grandmother's affection for it, apart from her absurd pride and ambition, so that she was glad to hold counsel over it with Susan, who had done such justice to her training as to be, in her eyes, a mother who had sense enough not to let her children waste and die; a rare merit in those days, and one that Susan could not disclaim, though she knew that it did not properly belong to her.

Cis had stood by all the time like a little statue, for no one, not even young Lady Talbot, durst sit down uninvited in the presence of Earl or Countess; but her black brows were bent, her gray eyes intent.

"Mother," she said, as they went home on their quiet mules, "are great ladies always so rudely spoken to one another?"

"I have not seen many great ladies, Cis, and my Lady Countess has always been good to me."

"Antony said that the Scots Queen and her ladies never storm at one another like my lady and her daughters."

"Open words do not always go deep, Cis," said the mother. "I had rather know and hear the worst at once." And then her heart smote her as she recollected that she might be implying censure of the girl's true mother, as well as defending wrath and passion, and she added, "Be that as it may, it is a happy thing to learn to refrain the tongue."

CHAPTER XI.

QUEEN MARY'S PRESENCE CHAMBER.

THE storm that followed on the instalment of the Lady Arbell at Sheffield was the precursor of many more. Her grandmother did sufficiently awake to the danger of alarming the jealousy of Queen Elizabeth to submit to leave her in the ordinary chambers of the children of the house, and to exact no extraordinary marks of respect towards the unconscious infant; but there was no abatement in the Countess's firm belief that an English-born, English-bred child, would have more right to the crown than any "foreign princes," as she contemptuously termed the Scottish Queen and her son.

Moreover, in her two years' intercourse with the elder Countess of Lennox, who was a gentle-tempered but commonplace woman, she had adopted to the full that unfortunate princess's entire belief in the guilt of Queen Mary, and entertained no doubt that she had been the murderer of Darnley. Old Lady Lennox had seen no real evidence, and merely believed what she was told by her lord, whose impeachment of Bothwell had been baffled by the Queen in a most suspicious manner. Conversations with this lady had entirely changed Lady Shrewsbury from the friendly

hostess of her illustrious captive, to be her enemy and persecutor, partly as being convinced of her guilt, partly as regarding her as an obstacle in the path of little Arbell to the throne. So she not only refused to pay her respects as usual to "that murtheress," but she insisted that her husband should tighten the bonds of restraint, and cut off all indulgences.

The Countess was one of the women to whom argument and reason are impossible, and who was entirely swayed by her predilections, as well as of so imperious a nature as to brook no opposition, and to be almost always able to sweep every one along with her.

Her own sons always were of her mind, and her daughters might fret and chafe, but were sure to take part with her against every one else outside the Cavendish family. The idea of being kinsfolk to the future Queen excited them all, and even Mary forgot her offence about the cradle, and her jealousy of Bess, and ranked herself against her stepfather, influencing her husband, Gilbert, on whom the unfortunate Earl had hitherto leant. On his refusal to persecute his unfortunate captive beyond the orders from the Court, Bess of Hardwicke, emboldened by the support she had gathered from her children, passionately declared that it could only be because he was himself in love with the murtheress. Lord Shrewsbury could not help laughing a little at the absurdity of the idea, whereupon my lady rose up in virtuous indignation, calling her sons and daughters to follow her.

All that night, lights might have been seen flitting about at the Manor-house, and early in the morning bugles sounded to horse. A huge procession, consisting of the Countess herself, and all her sons and

daughters then at Sheffield, little Lady Arbell, and the whole of their attendants, swept out of the gates of the park on the way to Hardwicke. When Richard Talbot went up to fulfil his duties as gentleman porter at the lodge the courts seemed well-nigh deserted, and a messenger summoned him at once to the Earl, whom he found in his bed-chamber in his morning gown terribly perturbed.

"For Heaven's sake send for your wife, Richard Talbot!" he said. "It is her Majesty's charge that some of mine household, or I myself, see this unhappy Queen of Scots each day for not less than two hours, as you well know. My lady has broken away, and all her daughters, on this accursed fancy—yea, and Gilbert too, Gilbert whom I always looked to to stand by me; I have no one to send. If I go and attend upon her alone, as I have done a thousand times to my sorrow, it will but give colour to the monstrous tale; but if your good wife, an honourable lady of the Hardwicke kin, against whom none ever breathed a word, will go and give the daily attendance, then can not the Queen herself find fault, and my wife's heated fancy can coin nothing suspicious. You must all come up, and lodge here in the Manor-house till this tempest be overpast. Oh, Richard, Richard! will it last out my life? My very children are turned against me. Go you down and fetch your good Susan, and take order for bringing up your children and gear. Benthall shall take your turn at the lodge. What are you tarrying for? Do you doubt whether your wife have rank enough to wait on the Queen? She should have been a knight's lady long ago, but that I deemed you would be glad to be quit of herald's fees; your service and estate have merited it, and I will crave license by

to-day's courier from her Majesty to lay knighthood on your shoulder."

"That was not what I thought of, my Lord, though I humbly thank you, and would be whatever was best for your Lordship's service, though, if it would serve you as well, I would rather be squire than knight; but I was bethinking me how we should bestow our small family. We have a young damsel at an age not to be left to herself."

"The black-browed maid—I recollect her. Let her e'en follow her mother. Queen Mary likes a young face, and is kindly disposed to little maids. She taught Bess Pierrepoint to speak French and work with her needle, and I cannot see that she did the lass any harm, nay, she is the only one of them all that can rule her tongue to give a soft answer if things go not after her will, and a maid might learn worse things. Besides, your wife will be there to look after the maiden, so you need have no fears. And for your sons, they will be at school, and can eat with us."

Richard's doubts being thus silenced he could not but bring his wife to his lord's rescue, though he well knew that Susan would be greatly disturbed on all accounts, and indeed he found her deep in the ironing that followed the great spring wash, and her housewifely mind was as much exercised as to the effects of her desertion, as was her maternal prudence at the plunge which her unconscious adopted child was about to make. However, there was no denying the request, backed as it was by her husband, looking at her proudly, and declaring she was by general consent the only discreet woman in Sheffield. She was very sorry for the Earl's perplexity, and had a loyal pity

for the Countess's vexation and folly, and she was consoled by the assurance that she would have a free time between dinner and supper to go home and attend to her wash, and finish her preparations. Cis, who had been left in a state of great curiosity, to continue compounding pickle while the mother was called away, was summoned to don her holiday kirtle, for she was to join in attendance on the Queen of Scots while Lady Shrewsbury and her daughters were absent.

It was unmixed delight to the girl, and she was not long in fresh-binding up her hair—black with a little rust-coloured tinge—under her stiff little cap, smoothing down the front, which was alone visible, putting on the well-stiffened ruff with the dainty little lace edge and close-fitting tucker, and then the gray home-spun kirtle, with the puffs at the top of the tight sleeves, and the slashes into which she had persuaded mother to insert some old pink satin, for was not she sixteen now, and almost a woman? There was a pink breast-knot to match, and Humfrey's owch just above it, gray stockings, home-spun and worked with elaborate pink clocks, but knitted by Cis herself; and a pair of shoes with pink roses to match were put into a bag, to be assumed when she arrived at the lodge. Out of this simple finery beamed a face, bright in spite of the straight, almost bushy, black brows. There was a light of youth, joy, and intelligence, about her gray eyes which made them sparkle all the more under their dark setting, and though her complexion had no brilliancy, only the clearness of health, and her features would not endure criticism, there was a wonderful lively sweetness about her fresh, innocent young mouth; and she had a tall lithe figure, sur-

passing that of her stepmother. She would have been a sonsie Border lass in appearance but for the remarkable carriage of her small head and shoulders, which was assuredly derived from her royal ancestry, and indeed her air and manner of walking were such that Diccon had more than once accused her of sailing about ambling like the Queen of Scots, an accusation which she hotly denied. Her hands had likewise a slender form and fine texture, such as none of the ladies of the houses of Talbot or Hardwicke could rival, but she was on the whole viewed as far from being a beauty. The taste of the day was altogether for light, sandy-haired, small-featured women, like Queen Elizabeth or her namesake of Hardwicke, so that Cis was looked on as a sort of crow, and her supposed parents were pitied for having so ill-favoured a daughter, so unlike all their families, except one black-a-vised Talbot grandmother, whose portrait had been discovered on a pedigree.

Much did Susan marvel what impression the daughter would make on the true mother as they jogged up on their sober ponies through the long avenues, whose branches were beginning to wear the purple shades of coming spring.

Lord Shrewsbury himself met them in front of the lodge, where, in spite of all his dignity, he had evidently been impatiently awaiting them. He thanked Susan for coming, as if he had not had a right to order, gave her his ungloved hand when she had dismounted, then at the single doorway of the lodge caused his gentleman to go through the form of requesting admission for himself and Mistress Talbot, his dear kinswoman, to the presence of the Queen. It was a ceremony daily observed as an acknowledgment

of Mary's royalty, and the Earl was far too courteous ever to omit it.

Queen Mary's willingness to admit him was notified by Sir Andrew Melville, a tall, worn man, with the typical Scottish countenance and a keen steadfast gray eye. He marshalled the trio up a circular staircase, made as easy as possible, but necessarily narrow, since it wound up through a brick turret at the corner, to the third and uppermost story of the lodge.

There, however, was a very handsome anteroom, with tapestry hangings, a richly moulded ceiling, and wide carved stone chimneypiece, where a bright fire was burning, around which sat several Scottish and French gentlemen, who rose at the Earl's entrance. Another wide doorway with a tapestry curtain over the folding leaves led to the presence chamber, and Sir Andrew announced in as full style as if he had been marshalling an English ambassador to the Court of Holyrood, the most high and mighty Earl of Shrewsbury. The room was full of March sunshine, and a great wood fire blazed on the hearth. Part of the floor was carpeted, and overhung with a canopy, proceeding from the tapestried wall, and here was a cross-legged velvet chair on which sat Queen Mary. This was all that Cis saw at first, while the Earl advanced, knelt on one step of the dais, with bared head, exchanging greetings with the Queen. He then added, that his wife, the Countess, and her daughter, having been called away from Sheffield, he would entreat her Grace to accept for a few days in their stead the attendance of his good kinswoman, Mrs. Talbot, and her daughter, Mistress Cicely.

Mary graciously intimated her consent, and extended her hand for each to kiss as they knelt in turn on the

step; Susan either fancied, or really saw a wonderful likeness in that taper hand to the little one whose stitches she had so often guided. Cis, on her part, felt the thrill of girlhood in the actual touch of the subject of her dreams. She stood, scarcely hearing what passed, but taking in, from under her black brows, all the surroundings, and recognising the persons from her former glimpses, and from Antony Babington's descriptions. The presence chamber was ample for the suite of the Queen, which had been reduced on every fresh suspicion. There was in it, besides the Queen's four ladies, an elderly one, with a close black silk hood—Jean Kennedy, or Mrs. Kennett as the English called her; another, a thin slight figure, with a worn face, as if a great sorrow had passed over her, making her look older than her mistress, was the Queen's last remaining Mary, otherwise Mrs. Seaton. The gossip of Sheffield had not failed to tell how the chamberlain, Beatoun, had been her suitor, and she had half consented to accept him when he was sent on a mission to France, and there died. The dark-complexioned bright-eyed little lady, on a smaller scale than the rest, was Marie de Courcelles, who, like the two others, had been the Queen's companion in all her adventures; and the fourth, younger and prettier than the rest, was already known to Cis and her mother, since she was the Barbara Mowbray who was affianced to Gilbert Curll, the Queen's Scottish secretary, recently taken into her service. Both these were Protestants, and, like the Bridgefield family, attended service in the castle chapel. They were all at work, as was likewise their royal lady, to whom the girl, with the youthful coyness that halts in the fulfilment of its dreams, did not at first raise her eyes, having first taken in all

the ladies, the several portions of one great coverlet which they were all embroidering in separate pieces, and the gentleman who was reading aloud to them from a large book placed on a desk at which he was standing.

When she did look up, as the Queen was graciously requesting her mother to be seated, and the Earl excusing himself from remaining longer, her first impression was one of disappointment. Either the Queen of Scots was less lovely seen leisurely close at hand than Antony Babington and Cis's own fancy had painted her, or the last two or three years had lessened her charms, as well they might, for she had struggled and suffered much in the interval, had undergone many bitter disappointments, and had besides endured much from rheumatism every winter, indeed, even now she could not ride, and could only go out in a carriage in the park on the finest days, looking forward to her annual visit to Buxton to set her up for the summer. Her face was longer and more pointed than in former days, her complexion had faded, or perhaps in these private moments it had not been worth while to enhance it; though there was no carelessness in the general attire, the black velvet gown, and delicate lace of the cap, and open ruff always characteristic of her. The small curls of hair at her temples had their auburn tint softened by far more white than suited one who was only just over forty, but the delicate pencilling of the eyebrows was as marked as ever; and the eyes, on whose colour no one ever agreed, melted and sparkled as of old. Cis had heard debates as to their hue, and furtively tried to form her own opinion, but could not decide on anything but that they had a dark effect, and a wonderful power of expression, seeming to look at every one at once, and to rebuke, encourage, plead,

or smile, from moment to moment. The slight cast in one of them really added to their force of expression rather than detracted from their beauty, and the delicate lips were ready to second the glances with wondrous smiles. Cis had not felt the magic of her mere presence five minutes without being convinced that Antony Babington was right; the Lord Treasurer and all the rest utterly wrong, and that she beheld the most innocent and persecuted of princesses.

Meantime, all due formalities having been gone through, Lord Shrewsbury bowed himself out backwards with a dexterity that Cis breathlessly admired in one so stately and so stiff, forgetting that he had daily practice in the art. Then Queen Mary courteously entreated her visitors to be seated, near herself, asking with a smile if this were not the little maiden who had queened it so prettily in the brake some few years since. Cis blushed and drew back her head with a pretty gesture of dignified shyness as Susan made answer for her that she was the same.

"I should have known it," said the Queen, smiling, "by the port of her head alone. 'Tis strange," she said, musing, "that maiden hath the bearing of head and neck that I have never seen save in my own mother, the saints rest her soul, and in her sisters, and which we always held to be their inheritance from the blood of Charlemagne."

"Your grace does her too much honour," Susan contrived to say, thankful that no less remote resemblance had been detected.

"It was a sad farce when they tried to repeat your pretty comedy with the chief performer omitted," proceeded the Queen, directing her words to the girl, but the mother replied for her.

"Your Grace will pardon me, I could not permit her to play in public, before all the *menié* of the castle."

"Madame is a discreet and prudent mother," said the Queen. "The mistake was in repeating the representation at all, not in abstaining from appearing in it. I should be very sorry that this young lady should have been concerned in a spectacle *à la comtesse*."

There was something in the intonation of "this young lady" that won Cis's heart on the spot, something in the concluding words that hurt Susan's faithful loyalty towards her kinswoman, in spite of the compliment to herself. However Mary did not pursue the subject, perceiving with ready tact that it was distasteful, and proceeded to ask Dame Susan's opinion of her work, which was intended as a gift to her good aunt, the Abbess of Soissons. How strangely the name fell upon Susan's ear. It was a pale blue satin coverlet, worked in large separate squares, innumerable shields and heraldic devices of Lorraine, Bourbon, France, Scotland, etc., round the border, and beautiful meandering patterns of branches, with natural flowers and leaves growing from them covering the whole with a fascinating regular irregularity. Cis could not repress an exclamation of delight, which brought the most charming glance of the winning eyes upon her. There was stitchery here that she did not understand, but when she looked at some of the flowers, she could not help uttering the sentiment that the eyes of the daisies were not as mother could make them.

So, as a great favour, Queen Mary entreated to be shown Mrs. Talbot's mode of dealing with the eyes of the daisies. No, her good Seaton would not learn so well as she should; Madame must come and sit by her and show her. Meantime here was her poor little

Bijou whimpering to be taken on her lap. Would not he find a comforter in sweet Mistress—ah, what was her name?

"We named her Cicely, so please your Grace," said Susan, unable to help blushing.

"Cécile, a fair name. Ah! so the poor Antoine called her. I see my Bijou has found a friend in you, Mistress Cécile"—as the girl's idle hands were only too happy to caress the pretty little shivering Italian greyhound rather than to be busy with a needle. "Do you ever hear of that young Babington, your playfellow?" she added.

"No, madam," said Cis, looking up, "he hath never been here!"

"I thought not," said Queen Mary, sighing. "Take heed to manifest no pity for me, maiden, if you should ever chance to be inspired with it for a poor worn-out old prisoner. It is the sure sentence of misfortune and banishment."

"In his sex, madam," here put in Marie de Courcelles. "If it were so in ours, woe to some of us."

"That is true, my dear friends," said Mary, her eyes glistening with dew. "It is the women who are the most fearless, the most faithful, and whom the saints therefore shield."

"Alas, there are some who are faithful but who are not shielded!"

It was merely a soft low murmur, but the tender-hearted Queen had caught it, and rising impulsively, crossed the room and gathered Mary Seaton's hands into hers, no longer the queen but the loving friend of equal years, soothing her in a low fond voice, and presently sending her to the inner chamber to compose herself. Then as the Queen returned slowly to her

seat it would be seen how lame she was from rheumatism. Mrs. Kennedy hurried to assist her, with a nurse-like word of remonstrance, to which she replied with a bewitching look of sweetness that she could not but forget her aches and pains when she saw her dear Mary Seaton in trouble.

Most politely she then asked whether her visitors would object to listening to the conclusion of her day's portion of reading. There was no refusing, of course, though, as Susan glanced at the reader and knew him to be strongly suspected of being in Holy Orders conferred abroad, she had her fears for her child's Protestant principles. The book, however, proved to be a translation of St. Austin on the Psalms, and, of course, she could detect nothing that she disapproved, even if Cis had not been far too much absorbed by the little dog and its mistress to have any comprehending ears for theology. Queen Mary confidentially observed as much to her after the reading, having, no doubt, detected her uneasy glance.

"You need not fear for your child, madam," she said; "St. Augustine is respected by your own Queen and her Bishops. At the readings with which my good Mr. Belton favours me, I take care to have nothing you Protestants dispute when I know it." She added, smiling, "Heaven knows that I have endeavoured to understand your faith, and many a minister has argued with me. I have done my best to comprehend them, but they agreed in nothing but in their abuse of the Pope. At least so it seemed to my poor weak mind. But you are satisfied, madam, I see it in your calm eyes and gentle voice. If I see much of you, I shall learn to think well of your religion."

Susan made an obeisance without answering. She

had heard Sir Gilbert Talbot say, "If she tries to persuade you that you can convert her, be sure that she means mischief," but she could not bear to believe it anything but a libel while the sweet sad face was gazing into hers.

Queen Mary changed the subject by asking a few questions about the Countess's sudden departure. There was a sort of guarded irony suppressed in her tone—she was evidently feeling her way with the stranger, and when she found that Susan would only own to causes Lord Shrewsbury had adduced on the spur of the moment, she was much too wary to continue the examination, though Susan could not help thinking that she knew full well the disturbance which had taken place.

A short walk on the roof above followed. The sun was shining brilliantly, and lame as she was, the Queen's strong craving for free air led her to climb her stairs and creep to and fro on Sir Andrew Melville's arm, gazing out over the noble prospect of the park close below, divided by the winding vales of the three rivers, which could be traced up into the woods and the moors beyond, purple with spring freshness and glory. Mary made her visitors point out Bridgefield, and asked questions about all that could be seen of the house and pleasance, which, in truth, was little enough, but she contrived to set Cis off into a girl's chatter about her home occupations, and would not let her be hushed.

"You little know the good it does a captive to take part, only in fancy, in a free harmless life," returned Mary, with the wistful look that made her eyes so pathetic. "There is no refreshment to me like a child's prattle."

Susan's heart smote her as she thought of the true relations in which these two stood to one another, and she forbore from further interference; but she greatly rejoiced when the great bell of the castle gave notice of noon, and of her own release. When Queen Mary's dinner was served, the Talbot ladies in attendance left her and repaired to the general family meal in the hall.

CHAPTER XII.

A FURIOUS LETTER.

A PERIOD now began of daily penance to Mrs. Talbot, of daily excitement and delight to Cis. Two hours or more had to be spent in attendance on Queen Mary. Even on Sundays there was no exemption, the visit only took place later in the day, so as not to interfere with going to church.

Nothing could be more courteous or more friendly than the manner in which the elder lady was always received. She was always made welcome by the Queen herself, who generally entered into conversation with her almost as with an equal. Or when Mary herself was engaged in her privy chamber in dictating to her secretaries, the ladies of the suite showed themselves equally friendly, and told her of their mistress's satisfaction in having a companion free from all the rude and unaccountable humours and caprices of my Lady Countess and her daughters. And if Susan was favoured, Cis was petted. Queen Mary always liked to have young girls about her. Their fresh, spontaneous, enthusiastic homage was pleasant to one who loved above all to attract, and it was a pleasure to a prisoner to have a fresh face about her.

Was it only this, or was it the maternal instinct

that made her face light up when the young girl entered the room and return the shy reverential kiss of the hand with a tender kiss on the forehead, that made her encourage the chatter, give little touches to the deportment, and present little keepsakes, which increased in value till Sir Richard began to look grave, and to say there must be no more jewels of price brought from the lodge? And as his wife uttered a word that sounded like remonstrance, he added, "Not while she passes for *my* daughter."

Cis, who had begun by putting on a pouting face, burst into tears. Her adopted parents had always been more tolerant and indulgent to her than if she had been a child over whom they felt entire rights, and instead of rewarding her petulance with such a blow as would have fallen to the lot of a veritable Talbot, Richard shrugged his shoulders and left the room—the chamber which had been allotted to Dame Susan at the Manor-house, while Susan endeavoured to cheer the girl by telling her not to grieve, for her father was not angry with her.

"Why—why may not the dear good Queen give me her dainty gifts?" sobbed Cis.

"See, dear child," said Susan, "while she only gave thee an orange stuck with cloves, or an embroidery needle, or even a puppy dog, it is all very well; but when it comes to Spanish gloves and coral clasps, the next time there is an outcry about a plot, some evil-disposed person would be sure to say that Master Richard Talbot had been taking bribes through his daughter."

"It would be vilely false!" cried Cis with flashing eyes.

"It would not be the less believed," said Susan. "My Lord would say we had betrayed our trust, and

there never has been one stain on my husband's honour."

"You are wroth with me too, mother!" said Cis.

"Not if you are a good child, and guard the honour of the name you bear."

"I will, I will!" said Cis. "Never will I take another gift from the Queen if only you and he will call me your child, and be—good to me——" The rest was lost in tears and in the tender caresses that Susan lavished on her; all the more as she caught the broken words, "Humfrey, too, he would never forgive me."

Susan told her husband what had passed, adding, "She will keep her word."

"She must, or she shall go no more to the lodge," he said.

"You would not have doubted had you seen her eye flash at the thought of bringing your honour into question. There spoke her kingly blood."

"Well, we shall see," sighed Richard, "if it be blood that makes the nature. I fear me hers is but that of a Scottish thief! Scorn not warning, mother, but watch thy stranger nestling well."

"Nay, mine husband. While we own her as our child, she will do anything to be one with us. It is when we seem to put her from us that we wound her so that I know not what she might do, fondled as she is—by—by her who—has the best right to the dear child."

Richard uttered a certain exclamation of disgust which silenced his discreet wife.

Neither of them had quite anticipated the result, namely, that the next morning, Cis, after kissing the Queen's hand as usual, remained kneeling, her bosom

heaving, and a little stammering on her tongue, while tears rose to her eyes.

"What is it, mignonne," said Mary, kindly; "is the whelp dead? or is the clasp broken?"

"No, madam; but—but I pray you give me no more gifts. My father says it touches his honour, and I have promised him—Oh, madam, be not displeased with me, but let me give you back your last beauteous gift."

Mary was standing by the fire. She took the ivory and coral trinket from the hand of the kneeling girl, and dashed it into the hottest glow. There was passion in the action, and in the kindling eye, but it was but for a moment. Before Cis could speak or Susan begin her excuses, the delicate hand was laid on the girl's head, and a calm voice said, "Fear not, child. Queens take not back their gifts. I ought to have borne in mind that I am balked of the pleasure of giving—the best of all the joys they have robbed me of. But tremble not, sweetheart, I am not chafed with thee. I will vex thy father no more. Better thou shouldst go without a trinket or two than deprive me of the light of that silly little face of thine, so long as they will leave me that sunbeam."

She stooped and kissed the drooping brow, and Susan could not but feel as if the voice of nature were indeed speaking.

A few words of apology in her character of mother for the maiden's abrupt proceeding were met by the Queen most graciously. "Spare thy words, good madam. We understand and reverence Mr. Talbot's point of honour. Would that all who approached us had held his scruples!"

Perhaps Mary was after this more distant and

dignified towards the matron, but especially tender and caressing towards the maiden, as if to make up by kindness for the absence of little gifts.

Storms, however, were brewing without. Lady Shrewsbury made open complaints of her husband having become one of Mary's many victims, representing herself as an injured wife driven out of her house. She actually in her rage carried the complaint to Queen Elizabeth, who sent down two commissioners to inquire into the matter. They sat in the castle hall, and examined all the attendants, including Richard and his wife. The investigation was extremely painful and distressing, but it was proved that nothing could have been more correct and guarded than the whole intercourse between the Earl and his prisoner. If he had erred, it had been on the side of caution and severity, though he had always preserved the courteous demeanour of a gentleman, and had been rejoiced to permit whatever indulgences could be granted. If there had been any transgressions of the strict rules, they had been made by the Countess herself and her daughters in the days of their intimacy with the Queen; and the aspersions on the unfortunate Earl were, it was soon evident, merely due to the violent and unscrupulous tongues of the Countess and her daughter Mary. No wonder that Lord Shrewsbury wrote letters in which he termed the lady "his wicked and malicious wife," and expressed his conviction that his son Gilbert's mind had been perverted by her daughter.

The indignation of the captive Queen was fully equal to his, as one after another of her little court returned and was made to detail the points on which he or she had been interrogated. Susan found her pacing up and down the floor like a caged tigress, her

cap and veil thrown back, so that her hair—far whiter than what was usually displayed—was hanging dishevelled, her ruff torn open, as if it choked back the swelling passion in her throat.

"Never, never content with persecuting me, they must insult me! Is it not enough that I am stripped of my crown, deprived of my friends; that I cannot take a step beyond this chamber, queen as I am, without my warder? Must they attaint me as a woman? Oh, why, why did the doom spare me that took my little brothers? Why did I live to be the most wretched, not of sovereigns alone, but of women?"

"Madam," entreated Marie de Courcelles, "dearest madam, take courage. All these horrible charges refute themselves."

"Ah, Marie! you have said so ten thousand times, and what charge has ever been dropped?"

"This one is dropped!" exclaimed Susan, coming forward. "Yes, your Grace, indeed it is! The Commissioner himself told my husband that no one believed it for a moment."

"Then why should these men have been sent but to sting and gall me, and make me feel that I am in their power?" cried the Queen.

"They came," said the Secretary Curll, "because thus alone could the Countess be silenced."

"The Countess!" exclaimed Mary. "So my cousin hath listened to her tongue!"

"Backed by her daughter's," added Jean Kennedy.

"It were well that she knew what those two dames can say of her Majesty herself, when it serves them," added Marie de Courcelles.

"That shall she!" exclaimed Mary. "She shall have it from mine own hand! Ha! ha! Elizabeth

shall know the choice tales wherewith Mary Talbot hath regaled us, and then shall she judge how far anything that comes from my young lady is worth heeding for a moment. Remember you all the tales of the nips and the pinches? Ay, and of all the endearments to Leicester and to Hatton? She shall have it all, and try how she likes the dish of scandal of Mary Talbot's cookery, sauced by Bess of Hardwicke. Here, nurse, come and set this head-gear of mine in order, and do you, my good Curll, have pen, ink, and paper in readiness for me."

The Queen did little but write that morning. The next day, on coming out from morning prayers, which the Protestants of her suite attended, with the rest of the Shrewsbury household, Barbara Mowbray contrived to draw Mrs. Talbot apart as they went towards the lodge.

"Madam," she said, "they all talk of your power to persuade. Now is the time you could do what would be no small service to this poor Queen, ay, and it may be to your own children."

"I may not meddle in any matters of the Queen's," returned Susan, rather stiffly.

"Nay, but hear me, madam. It is only to hinder the sending of a letter."

"That letter which her Grace was about to write yesterday?"

"Even so. 'Tis no secret, for she read fragments of it aloud, and all her women applauded it with all their might, and laughed over the stings that it would give, but Mr. Curll, who had to copy it, saith that there is a bitterness in it that can do nothing but make her Majesty of England the more inflamed, not only against my Lady Shrewsbury, but against her who writ

the letter, and all concerned. Why, she hath even brought in the comedy that your children acted in the woodland, and that was afterwards repeated in the hall!"

"You say not so, Mistress Barbara?"

"Indeed I do. Mr. Curll and Sir Andrew Melville are both of them sore vexed, and would fain have her withdraw it; but Master Nau and all the French part of the household know not how to rejoice enough at such an exposure of my Lady, which gives a hard fling at Queen Elizabeth at the same time! Nay, I cannot but tell you that there are things in it that Dame Mary Talbot might indeed say, but I know not how Queen Mary could bring herself to set down——"

Barbara Mowbray ventured no more, and Susan felt hopeless of her task, since how was she by any means to betray knowledge of the contents of the letter? Yet much that she had heard made her feel very uneasy on all accounts. She had too much strong family regard for the Countess and for Gilbert Talbot and his wife to hear willingly of what might imperil them, and though royal indignation would probably fly over the heads of the children, no one was too obscure in those Tudor times to stand in danger from a sovereign who might think herself insulted. Yet as a Hardwicke, and the wife of a Talbot, it was most unlikely that she would have any opening for remonstrance given to her.

However, it was possible that Curll wished to give her an opening, for no sooner were the ladies settled at work than he bowed himself forward and offered his mistress his copy of the letter.

"Is it fair engrossed, good Curll?" asked Mary.

"Thanks. Then will we keep your copy, and you shall fold and prepare our own for our sealing."

"Will not your Majesty hear it read over ere it pass out of your hands?" asked Curll.

"Even so," returned Mary, who really was delighted with the pungency of her own composition. "Mayhap we may have a point or two to add."

After what Mistress Barbara had said, Susan was on thorns that Cis should hear the letter; but that good young lady, hating the expressions therein herself, and hating it still more for the girl, bethought her of asking permission to take Mistress Cicely to her own chamber, there to assist her in the folding of some of her laces, and Mary consented. It was well, for there was much that made the English-bred Susan's cheeks glow and her ears tingle.

But, at least, it gave her a great opportunity. When the letter was finished, she advanced and knelt on the step of the canopied chair, saying, "Madam, pardon me, if in the name of my unfortunate children, I entreat you not to accuse them to the Queen."

"Your children, lady! How have I included them in what I have told her Majesty of our sweet Countess?"

"Your Grace will remember that the foremost parts in yonder farce were allotted to my son Humfrey and to young Master Babington. Nay, that the whole arose from the woodland sport of little Cis, which your Grace was pleased to admire."

"Sooth enough, my good gossip, but none could suspect the poor children of the malice my Lady Countess contrived to put into the matter."

"Ah, madam! these are times when it is convenient to shift the blame on one who can be securely punished."

"Certes," said Mary, thoughtfully, "the Countess is capable of making her escape by denouncing some one else, especially those within her own reach."

"Your Grace, who can speak such truth of my poor Lady," said Susan, "will also remember that though my Lord did yield to the persuasions of the young ladies, he so heedfully caused Master Sniggius to omit all perilous matter, that no one not informed would have guessed at the import of the piece, as it was played in the hall."

"Most assuredly not," said Mary, laughing a little at the recollection. "It might have been played in Westminster Hall without putting my gracious cousin, ay, or Leicester and Hatton themselves, to the blush."

"Thus, if the Queen should take the matter up and trace it home, it could not but be brought to my poor innocent children! Humfrey is for the nonce out of reach, but the maiden—I wis verily that your Highness would be loath to do her any hurt!"

"Thou art a good pleader, madam," said the queen. "Verily I should not like to bring the bonnie lassie into trouble. It will give Master Curll a little more toil, ay and myself likewise, for the matter must stand in mine own hand; but we will leave out yonder unlucky farce."

"Your Highness is very good," said Susan earnestly.

"Yet you look not yet content, my good lady. What more would you have of me?"

"What your Majesty will scarce grant," said Susan.

"Ha! thou art of the same house thyself. I had forgotten it; thou art so unlike to them. I wager that it is not to send this same letter at all."

"Your Highness hath guessed my mind. Nay, madam, though assuredly I do desire it because the

Countess hath been ever my good lady, and bred me up ever since I was an orphan, it is not solely for her sake that I would fain pray you, but fully as much for your Majesty's own."

"Madame Talbot sees the matter as I do," said Sir Andrew Melville. "The English Queen is as like to be irate with the reporter of the scandal as with the author of it, even as the wolf bites the barb that pierces him when he cannot reach the archer."

"She is welcome to read the letter," said Mary, smiling; "thy semblance falleth short, my good friend."

"Nay, madam, that was not the whole of my purport," said Susan, standing with folded hands, looking from one to another. "Pardon me. My thought was that to take part in all this repeating of thoughtless, idle words, spoken foolishly indeed, but scarce so much in malice as to amuse your Grace with Court news, and treasured up so long, your Majesty descends from being the patient and suffering princess, meek, generous, and uncomplaining, to be—to be——"

"No better than one of them, wouldst thou add?" asked Mary, somewhat sharply, as Susan paused.

"Your Highness has said it," answered Susan; then, as there was a moment's pause, she looked up, and with clasped hands added, "Oh, madam! would it not be more worthy, more noble, more queenly, more Christian, to refrain from stinging with this repetition of these vain and foolish slanders?"

"Most Christian treatment have I met with," returned Mary; but after a pause she turned to her almoner, Master Belton, saying, "What say you, sir?"

"I say that Mrs. Talbot speaks more Christian words than are often heard in these parts," returned he. "The thankworthiness of suffering is lost by

those who return the revilings upon those who utter them."

"Then be it so," returned the Queen. "Elizabeth shall be spared the knowledge that some ladies' tongues can be as busy with her as with her poor cousin."

With her own hands Mary tore up her own letter, but Curll's copy unfortunately escaped destruction, to be discovered in after times. Lord and Lady Shrewsbury never knew the service Susan had rendered them by causing it to be suppressed.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEADS AND BRACELETS.

THE Countess was by no means pacified by the investigation, and both she and her family remained at Court, maligning her husband and his captive. As the season advanced, bringing the time for the Queen's annual resort to the waters of Buxton, Lord Shrewsbury was obliged to entreat Mrs. Talbot again to be her companion, declaring that he had never known so much peace as with that lady in the Queen's chambers.

The journey to Buxton was always the great holiday of the imprisoned Court. The place was part of the Shrewsbury property, and the Earl had a great house there, but there were no conveniences for exercising so strict a watch as at Sheffield, and there was altogether a relaxation of discipline. Exercise was considered an essential part of the treatment, and recreations were there provided.

Cis had heard so much of the charms of the expedition, that she was enraptured to hear that she was to share it, together with Mrs. Talbot. The only drawback was that Humfrey had promised to come home after this present voyage, to see whether his little Cis were ready for him; and his father was much disposed to remain at home, receive him first, and

communicate to him the obstacles in the way of wedding the young lady. However, my Lord refused to dispense with the attendance of his most trustworthy kinsman, and leaving Ned at school under charge of the learned Sniggius, the elder and the younger Richard Talbot rode forth with the retinue of the Queen and her warder.

Neither Cicely nor Diccon had ever left home before, and they were in raptures which would have made any journey delightful to them, far more a ride through some of the wildest and loveliest glades that England can display. Nay, it may be that they would better have enjoyed something less like Sheffield Park than the rocks, glens, and woods, through which they rode. Their real delight was in the towns and villages at which there was a halt, and every traveller they saw was such a wonder to them, that at the end of the first day they were almost as full of exultation in their experiences, as if, with Humfrey, they had been far on the way to America.

The delight of sleeping at Tideswell was in their eyes extreme, though the hostel was so crowded that Cis had to share a mattress with Mrs. Talbot, and Diccon had to sleep in his cloak on the floor, which he persuaded himself was high preferment. He woke, however, much sooner than was his wont, and finding it useless to try to fall asleep again, he made his way out among the sleeping figures on the floor and hall, and finding the fountain in the midst of the court, produced his soap and comb from his pocket, and made his morning toilet in the open air with considerable satisfaction at his own alertness. Presently there was a tap at the window above, and he saw Cicely making signals to him to wait for her, and in a few

minutes she skipped out from the door into the sunlight of the early summer morning.

"No one is awake yet," she said. "Even the guard before the Queen's door is fast asleep. I only heard a wench or two stirring. We can have a run in the fields and gather May dew before any one is afoot."

"'Tis not May, 'tis June," said matter-of-fact Diccon. "But yonder is a guard at the yard gate; will he let us past?"

"See, here's a little wicket into a garden of pot-herbs," said Cis. "No doubt we can get out that way, and it will bring us the sooner into the fields. I have a cake in my wallet that mother gave me for the journey, so we shall not fast. How sweet the herbs smell in the dew—and see how silvery it lies on the strawberry leaves. Ah! thou naughty lad, think not whether the fruit be ripe. Mayhap we shall find some wild ones beyond."

The gate of the garden was likewise guarded, but by a yeoman who well knew the young Talbots, and made no difficulty about letting them out into the broken ground beyond the garden, sloping up into a little hill. Up bounded the boy and girl, like young mountaineers, through gorse and fern, and presently had gained a sufficient height to look over the country, marking the valleys whence still were rising "fragrant clouds of dewy steam" under the influence of the sunbeams, gazing up at the purple heights of the Peak, where a few lines of snow still lingered in the crevices, trying to track their past journey from their own Sheffield, and with still more interest to guess which wooded valley before them contained Buxton.

"Have you lost your way, my pretty mistress?" said a voice close to them, and turning round hastily

they saw a peasant woman with a large basket on her arm.

"No," said Cicely courteously, "we have only come out to take the air before breakfast."

"I crave pardon," said the woman, curtseying, "the pretty lady belongs to the great folk down yonder. Would she look at my poor wares? Here are beads and trinkets of the goodly stones, pins and collars, bracelets and eardrops, white, yellow, and purple," she said, uncovering her basket, where were arranged various ornaments made of Derbyshire spar.

"We have no money, good woman," said Cicely, rising to return, vaguely uncomfortable at the woman's eye, which awoke some remembrance of Tibbott the huckster, and the troubles connected with her.

"Yea, but if my young mistress would only bring me in to the Great Lady there, I know she would buy of me my beads and bracelets, or give me an alms for my poor children. I have five of them, good young lady, and they lie naked and hungry till I can sell my few poor wares, and the yeomen are so rough and hard. They would break and trample every poor bead I have in pieces rather than even let my Lord hear of them. But if even my basket could be carried in and shown, and if the good Earl heard my sad tale, I am sure he would give license."

"He never does!" said Diccon, roughly; "hold off, woman, do not hang on us, or I'll get thee branded for a vagabond."

The woman put her knuckles into her eyes, and wailed out that it was all for her poor children, and Cicely reproved him for his roughness, and as the woman kept close behind them, wailing, moaning, and persuading, the boy and girl were wrought upon at

last to give her leave to wait outside the gate of the inn garden, while they saw whether it was possible to admit her or her basket.

But before they reached the gate, they saw a figure beyond it, scanning the hill eagerly. They knew him for their father even before he shouted to them, and, as they approached, his voice was displeased: "How now, children; what manners are these?"

"We have only been on the hillside, sweet father," said Cis, "Diccon and I together. We thought no harm."

"This is not Sheffield Chace, Cis, and thou art no more a child, but a maiden who needs to be discreet, above all in these times. Whom did I see following you?"

"A poor woman, whom — Ha, where is she?" exclaimed Cis, suddenly perceiving that the woman seemed to have vanished.

"A troublesome begging woman who beset us with her wares," said Diccon, "and would give us no peace, praying that we would get them carried in to the Queen and her ladies, whining about her children till she made Cis soft-hearted. Where can she have hidden herself?"

The man who was stationed as sentry at the gate said he had seen the woman come over the brow of the hill with Master Diccon and Mistress Cicely, but that as they ran forward to meet Captain Talbot she had disappeared amid the rocks and brushwood.

"Poor woman, she was afraid of our father," said Cicely; "I would we could see her again."

"So would not I," said Richard. "It looks not well, and heed me well, children, there must be no more of these pranks, nor of wandering out of bounds, or babbling with strangers. Go thou in to thy mother, Cis, she hath been in much trouble for thee."

Mistress Susan was unusually severe with the girl on the indiscretion of gadding in strange places with no better escort than Diccon, and of entering into conversation with unknown persons. Moreover, Cicely's hair, her shoes, and camlet riding skirt were all so dank with dew that she was with difficulty made presentable by the time the horses were brought round. The Queen, who had not seen the girl that morning, made her come and ride near her, asking questions on the escapade, and giving one of her bewitching pathetic smiles as she said how she envied the power of thus dancing out on the greensward, and breathing the free and fresh morning air. "My Scottish blood loves the mountains, and bounds the more freely in the fresh breeze," she said, gazing towards the Peak. "I love the scent of the dew. Didst get into trouble, child? Methought I heard sounds of chiding?"

"It was no fault of mine," said Cis, inclined to complain when she found sympathy, "the woman *would* speak to us."

"What woman?" asked the Queen.

"A poor woman with a basket of wares, who prayed hard to be allowed to show them to your Grace or some of the ladies. She said she had five sorely hungered children, and that she heard your Grace was a compassionate lady."

"Woe is me, compassion is full all that I am permitted to give," said the Queen, sadly; "she brought trinkets to sell. What were her wares, saidst thou?"

"I had no time to see many," said Cis, "something pure and white like a new-laid egg, I saw, and a necklet, clouded with beauteous purple."

"Ay, beads and bracelets, no doubt," said the Queen.

"Yes, beads and bracelets," returned Cicely, the soft chime of the Queen's Scottish accent bringing back to her that the woman had twice pressed on her beads and bracelets.

"She dwelt on them," said the Queen lightly. "Ay, I know the chant of the poor folk who ever hover about our outskirts in hopes to sell their country gewgaws, beads and bracelets, collars and pins, little guessing that she whom they seek is poorer than themselves. Mayhap, our Argus-eyed lord may yet let the poor dame within his fence, and we may be able to gratify thy longing for those same purple and white beads and bracelets."

Meantime the party were riding on, intending to dine at Buxton, which meant to reach it by noonday. The tall roof of the great hall erected by the Earl over the baths was already coming in sight, and by and by they would look into the valley. The Wye, after coming down one of those lovely deep ravines to be found in all mountainous countries, here flowed through a more open space, part of which had been artificially levelled, but which was covered with buildings, rising out amongst the rocks and trees.

Most conspicuous among them was a large freshly-built erection in Tudor architecture, with a wide portal arch, and five separate gables starting from one central building, which bore a large clock-tower, and was decorated at every corner with the Talbots' stout and sturdy form. This was the great hall, built by the present Earl George, and containing five baths, intended to serve separately for each sex, gentle and simple, with one special bath reserved for the sole use of the more distinguished visitors. Besides this, at no great distance, was the Earl's own mansion, "a very goodly house, four

square, four stories high," with stables, offices, and all the requisites of a nobleman's establishment, and this was to be the lodging of the Scottish Queen.

Farther off was another house, which had been built by permission of the Earl, under the auspices of Dr. Jones, probably one of the first of the long series of physicians who have made it their business to enhance the fame of the watering-places where they have set up their staff. This was the great hostel or lodging-house for the patients of condition who resorted to the healing springs, and nestled here and there among the rocks were cottages which accommodated, after a fashion, the poorer sort, who might drag themselves to the spot in the hope of washing away their rheumatic pains and other infirmities. In a distant and magnificent way, like some of the lesser German potentates, the mighty Lord of Shrewsbury took toll from the visitors to his baths, and this contributed to repair the ravages to his fortune caused by the maintenance of his royal captive.

Arriving just at noontide, the Queen and her escort beheld a motley crowd dispersed about the sward on the banks of the river, some playing at ball, others resting on benches or walking up and down in groups, exercise being recommended as part of the cure. All thronged together to watch the Earl and his captive ride in with their suite, the household turning out to meet them, while foremost stood a dapper little figure with a short black cloak, a stiff round ruff, and a square barrett cap, with a gold-headed cane in one hand and a paper in the other.

"Prepare thy patience, Cis," whispered Barbara Mowbray, "now shall we not be allowed to alight from our palfreys till we have heard his full welcome

to my Lord, and all his plans for this place, how it is to be made a sanctuary for the sick during their abode there, for all causes saving sacrilege, treason, murder, burglary, and highway robbery, with a license to eat flesh on a Friday, as long as they are drinking the waters!"

It was as Mistress Mowbray said. Dr. Jones's harangue on the progress of Buxton and its prospects had always to be endured before any one was allowed to dismount; but royalty and nobility were inured to listening with a good grace, and Mary, though wearied and aching, sat patiently in the hot sunshine, and was ready to declare that Buxton put her in good humour. In fact the grandees and their immediate attendants endured with all the grace of good breeding; but the farther from the scene of action, the less was the patience, and the more restless and confused the movements of the retinue.

Diccon Talbot, hungry and eager, had let his equally restless pony convey him, he scarce knew where, from his father's side, when he saw, making her way among the horses, the very woman with the basket whom he had encountered at Tideswell in the early morning. How could she have gone such a distance in the time? thought the boy, and he presently caught the words addressed to one of the grooms of the Scottish Queen's suite. "Let me show my poor *beads and bracelets.*" The Scotsman instantly made way for her, and she advanced to a wizened thin old Frenchman, Maître Gorion, the Queen's surgeon, who jumped down from his horse, and was soon bending over her basket exchanging whispers in the lowest possible tones; but a surge among those in the rear drove Diccon up so near that he was absolutely certain that they were

speaking French, as indeed he well knew that M. Gorion never could succeed in making himself understood in English.

The boy, bred up in the perpetual caution and suspicion of Sheffield, was eager to denounce one who he was sure was a conspirator; but he was hemmed in among horses and men, so that he could not make his way out or see what was passing, till suddenly there was a scattering to the right and left, and a simultaneous shriek from the ladies in front.

When Diccon could see anything, his father was pressing forward to a group round some one prostrate on the ground before the house, and there were exclamations, "The poor young lady! The chirurgeon! To the front, the Queen is asking for you, sir," and Cicely's horse with loose bridle passed before his eyes.

"Let me through! let me through!" cried the boy; "it is my sister."

He threw his bridle to a groom, and, squeezing between horses and under elbows, succeeded in seeing Cis lying on the ground with her eyes shut and her head in his mother's lap, and the French surgeon bending over her. She gave a cry when he touched her arm, and he said something in his mixture of French and English, which Diccon could not hear. The Queen stood close by, a good deal agitated, anxiously asking questions, and throwing out her hands in her French fashion. Diccon, much frightened, struggled on, but only reached the party just as his father had gathered Cicely up in his arms to carry her upstairs. Diccon followed as closely as he could, but blindly in the crowd in the strange house, until he found himself in a long gallery, shut out, among various others of both sexes. "Come, my masters and mistresses all,"

said the voice of the seneschal, "you had best to your chambers, there is naught for you to do here."

However, he allowed Diccon to remain leaning against the balustrade of the stairs which led up outside the house, and in another minute his father came out. "Ha, Diccon, that is well," said he. "No, thou canst not enter. They are about to undress poor little Cis. Nay, it seemed not to me that she was more hurt than thy mother could well have dealt with, but the French surgeon would thrust in, and the Queen would have it so. We will walk here in the court till we hear what he saith of her. How befell it, dost thou ask? Truly I can hardly tell, but I believe one of the Frenchmen's horses got restless, either with a fly or with standing so long to hear yonder leech's discourse. He must needs cut the beast with his rod, and so managed to hit White Posy, who starts aside, and Cis, sitting unheedfully on that new-fangled French saddle, was thrown in an instant."

"I shall laugh at her well for letting herself be thrown by a Frenchman with his switch," said Diccon.

"I hope the damage hath not been great," said his father, anxiously looking up the stair. "Where wast thou, Dick? I had lost sight of thee."

"I was seeking you, sir, for I had seen a strange sight," said Dick. "That woman who spoke with us at Tideswell was here again; yea, and she talked with the little old Frenchman that they call Gorion, the same that is with Cis now."

"She did! Folly, boy! The fellow can hardly comprehend five words of plain English together, long as he hath been here! One of the Queen's women is gone in even now to interpret for him."

"That do I wot, sir. Therefore did I marvel, and sought to tell you."

"What like was the woman?" demanded Richard.

Diccon's description was lame, and his father bade him hasten out of the court, and fetch the woman if he could find her displaying her trinkets to the water-drinkers, instructing him not to alarm her by peremptory commands, but to give her hopes of a purchaser for her spars. Proud of the commission entrusted to him, the boy sallied forth, but though he wandered through all the groups on the sward, and encountered two tumblers and one puppet show, besides a bear and monkey, he utterly failed in finding the vendor of the beads and bracelets.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MONOGRAMS.

When Cicely had been carried into a chamber by Master Talbot, and laid half-conscious and moaning on the grand carved bed, Mrs. Talbot by word and gesture expelled all superfluous spectators. She would have preferred examining alone into the injury sustained by the maiden, which she did not think beyond her own management; but there was no refusing the services of Maître Gorion, or of Mrs. Kennedy, who indeed treated her authoritatively, assuming the direction of the sick-room. She found herself acting under their orders as she undid the boddice, while Mrs. Kennedy ripped up the tight sleeve of the riding dress, and laid bare the arm and shoulder, which had been severely bruised and twisted, but neither broken nor dislocated, as Mrs. Kennedy informed her, after a few rapid words from the Frenchman, unintelligible to the English lady, who felt somewhat impatient of this invasion of her privileges, and was ready to say she had never supposed any such thing.

The chirurgeon skipped to the door, and for a moment she hoped that she was rid of him, but he had only gone to bring in a neat case with which his

groom was in waiting outside, whence he extracted a lotion and sponge, speaking rapidly as he did so.

"Now, madam," said Jean Kennedy, "lift the lassie, there, turn back her boddice, and we will bathe her shouther. So! By my halidome!"

"Ah! *Mort de ma vie!*"

The two exclamations darted simultaneously from the lips of the Scottish nurse and the French doctor. Susan beheld what she had at the moment forgotten, the curious mark branded on her nursling's shoulder, which indeed she had not seen since Cicely had been of an age to have the care of her own person, and which was out of the girl's own sight. No more was said at the moment, for Cis was reviving fast, and was so much bewildered and frightened that she required all the attention and soothing that the two women could give, but when they removed the rest of her clothing, so that she might be laid down comfortably to rest, Mrs. Kennedy by another dexterous movement uncovered enough of the other shoulder to obtain a glimpse of the monogram upon it.

Nothing was spoken. Those two had not been so many years attendants on a suspected and imprisoned queen without being prudent and cautious; but when they quitted the apartment after administering a febrifuge, Susan felt a pang of wonder, whether they were about to communicate their discovery to their mistress. For the next quarter of an hour, the patient needed all her attention, and there was no possibility of obeying the summons of a great clanging bell which announced dinner. When, however, Cis had fallen asleep it became possible to think over the situation. She foresaw an inquiry, and would have given much for a few words with her husband; but reflection showed her that the one point

essential to his safety was not to betray that he and she had any previous knowledge of the rank of their nursling. The existence of the scroll might have to be acknowledged, but to show that Richard had deciphered it would put him in danger on all hands.

She had just made up her mind on this point when there was a knock at the door, and Mrs. Kennedy bore in a salver with a cup of wine, and took from an attendant, who remained outside, a tray with some more solid food, which she placed on the broad edge of the deep-set window, and coming to the bedside, invited Mrs. Talbot to eat, while she watched the girl. Susan complied, though with little appetite, and Mrs. Kennedy, after standing for a few minutes in contemplation, came to the window. She was a tall woman, her yellow hair softened by an admixture of gray, her eyes keen and shrewd, yet capable of great tenderness at times, her features certainly not youthful, but not a whit more aged than they had been when Susan had first seen her fourteen years ago. It was a quiet mouth, and one that gave a sense of trust both in its firmness, secrecy, and kindness.

"Madam," said she, in her soft Scotch voice, lowered considerably, but not whispering, and with her keen eyes fixed on Susan—"Madam, what garred ye gie your bit lassie yonder marks? Ye need not fear, that draught of Maister Gorion's will keep her sleeping fast for a good hour or two longer, and it behoves me to ken how she cam by yonder brands."

"She had them when she came to us," said Susan.

"Ye'll no persuade me that they are birth marks," returned Mistress Jean. "Such a thing would be a miracle in a loyal Scottish Catholic's wean, let alone an English heretic's."

"No," said Susan, who had in fact only made the answer to give herself time to think whether it were possible to summon her husband. "They never seemed to me birth marks."

"Woman," said Jean Kennedy, laying a strong, though soft hand, on her wrist, "this is not gear for trifling. Is the lass your ain bairn? Ha! I always thought she had mair of the kindly Scot than of the Southron about her. Hech! so they made the puir wean captive! Wha gave her till you to keep? Your lord, I trow."

"The Lord of heaven and earth," replied Susan. "My husband took her, the only living thing left on a wreck off the Spurn Head."

"Hech, sirs!" exclaimed Mrs. Kennedy, evidently much struck, but still exercising great self-command. "And when fell this out?"

"Two days after Low Sunday, in the year of grace 1568," returned Susan.

"My halidome!" again ejaculated Jean, in a low voice, crossing herself. "And what became of honest Ailie—I mean," catching herself up, "what befell those that went with her?"

"Not one lived," said Susan, gravely. "The mate of my husband's ship took the little one from the arms of her nurse, who seemed to have been left alone with her by the crew, lashed to the wreck, and to have had her life freshly beaten out by the winds and waves, for she was still warm. I was then lying at Hull, and they brought the babe to me, while there was still time to save her life, with God's blessing."

"And the vessel?" asked Jean.

"My husband held it to be the *Bride of Dunbar*, plying between that port and Harfleur."

"Ay! ay! Blessed St. Bride!" muttered Jean Kennedy, with an awe-stricken look; then, collecting herself, she added, "Were there no tokens, save these, about the little one, by which she could be known?"

"There was a gold chain with a cross, and what you call a reliquary about her little neck, and a scroll written in cipher among her swaddling bands; but they are laid up at home, at Bridgefield."

It was a perplexing situation for this simple-hearted and truthful woman, and, on the other hand, Jean Kennedy was no less devoted and loyal in her own line, a good and conscientious woman, but shrewder, and, by nature and breeding, far less scrupulous as to absolute truth.

The one idea that Susan, in her confusion, could keep hold of was that any admission of knowledge as to who her Cis really was, would be a betrayal of her husband's secret; and on the other hand she saw that Mrs. Kennedy, though most keen to discover everything, and no doubt convinced that the maiden was her Queen's child, was bent on not disclosing that fact to the foster-mother.

She asked anxiously whether Mistress Cicely knew of her being only an adopted child, and Susan replied that they had intended that she never should learn that she was of alien birth; but that it had been revealed by the old sailor who had brought her on board the *Mastiff*, though no one had heard him save young Humfrey and the girl herself, and they had been, so far as she knew, perfectly reserved on the subject.

Jean Kennedy then inquired how the name of Cicely had been given, and whether the child had been so baptized by Protestant rites.

"Wot you who the maid may be, madam?" Susan

took courage to ask; but the Scotswoman would not be disconcerted, and replied,

"How suld I ken without a sight of the tokens? Gin I had them, maybe I might give a guess, but there was mony a leal Scot sairly bestead, wife and wean and all, in her Majesty's cause that wearie spring."

Here Cis stirred in her sleep, and both women were at her side in a moment, but she did not wake.

Jean Kennedy stood gazing at the girl with eagerness that she did not attempt to conceal, studying each feature in detail; but Cis showed in her sleep very little of her royal lineage, which betrayed itself far more in her gait and bearing than in her features. Susan could not help demanding of the nurse whether she saw any resemblance that could show the maiden's parentage.

The old lady gave a kind of Scotch guttural sound expressive of disappointment, and said, "I'll no say but I've seen the like beetle-broo. But we'll waken the bairn with our clavers. I'll away the noo. Maister Gorion will see her again ere night, but it were ill to break her sleep, the puir lassie!"

Nevertheless, she could not resist bending over and kissing the sleeper, so gently that there was no movement. Then she left the room, and Susan stood with clasped hands.

"My child! my child! Oh, is it coming on thee? Wilt thou be taken from me! Oh, and to what a fate! And to what hands! They will never never love thee as we have done! O God, protect her, and be her Father."

And Susan knelt by the bed in such a paroxysm of grief that her husband, coming in unshod that he might not disturb the girl, apprehended that she had become seriously worse.

However, his entrance awoke her, and she found herself much better, and was inclined to talk, so he sat down on a chest by the bed, and related what Diccon had told him of the reappearance of the woman with the basket of spar trinkets.

"Beads and bracelets," said Cicely.

"Ay?" said he. "What knowest thou of them?"

"Only that she spake the words so often; and the Queen, just ere that doctor began his speech, asked of me whether she did not sell beads and bracelets."

"'Tis a password, no doubt, and we must be on our guard," said Richard, while his wife demanded with whom Diccon had seen her speaking.

"With Gorion," returned he. "That was what made the lad suspect something, knowing that the chirurgeon can barely speak three sentences in any tongue but his own, and those are in their barbarous Scotch. I took the boy with me and inquired here, there, and everywhere this afternoon, but could find no one who had ever seen or heard of any one like her."

"Tell me, Cis," exclaimed Susan, with a sudden conviction, "was she like in any fashion to Tibbott the huckster-woman who brought young Babington into trouble three years agone?"

"Women's heads all run on one notion," said Richard. "Can there be no secret agents save poor Cuthbert, whom I believe to be beyond seas?"

"Nay, but hear what saith the child?" asked Susan.

"This woman was not nearly so old as Tibbott," said Cis, "nor did she walk with a staff, nor had she those grizzled black brows that were wont to frighten me."

"But was she tall?" asked Susan.

"Oh yes, mother. She was very tall—she came after Diccon and me with long strides—yet it could never have been Tibbott!"

Susan had reasons for thinking otherwise, but she could not pursue the subject at that time, as she had to go down to supper with her husband, and privacy was impossible. Even at night, nobody enjoyed extensive quarters, and but for Cicely's accident she would have slept with Dyot, the tirewoman, who had arrived with the baggage, which included a pallet bed for them. However, the young lady had been carried to a chamber intended for one of Queen Mary's suite; and there it was decreed that she should remain for the night, the mother sleeping with her, while the father and son betook themselves to the room previously allotted to the family. Only on the excuse of going to take out her husband's gear from the mails was Susan able to secure a few words with him, and then by ordering out Diccon, Dyot, and the serving-man. Then she could succeed in saying, "Mine husband, all will soon out—Mistress Kennedy and Master Gorion have seen the brands on the child's shoulders. It is my belief that she of the 'beads and bracelets' bade the chirurgeon look for them. Else, why should he have thrust himself in for a hurt that women-folk had far better have tended? Now, that kinsman of yours knew that poor Cis was none of ours, and gave her a hint of it long ago—that is, if Tibbott were he, and not something worse."

Richard shook his head. "Give a woman a hint of a seminary priest in disguise, and she would take a new-born baby for one. I tell thee I heard that Cuthbert was safe in Paris. But, be that as it may, I trust thou hast been discreet."

"So I strove to be," said Susan. "Mrs. Kennedy questioned me, and I told her."

"What?" sharply demanded her husband.

"Nought but truth," she answered, "save that I showed no knowledge who the maid really is, nor let her guess that you had read the scroll."

"That is well. Frank Talbot was scarce within his duty when he gave me the key, and it were as much as my head were worth to be known to have been aware of the matter." To this Susan could only assent, as they were interrupted by the serving-man coming to ask directions about the bestowal of the goods.

She was relieved by this short colloquy, but it was a sad and wakeful night for her as Cicely slept by her side. Her love was too truly motherly not to be deeply troubled at the claim of one of differing religion and nation, and who had so uncertain and perilous a lot in which to place her child. There was also the sense that all her dearest, including her eldest son, were involved in the web of intrigue with persons far mightier and more unscrupulous than themselves; and that, however they might strive to preserve their integrity, it would be very hard to avoid suspicion and danger.

In this temporary abode, the household of the Queen and of the Earl ate together, in the great hall, and thus while breaking their fast in the morning Jean Kennedy found opportunity to examine Richard Talbot on all the circumstances of the wreck of the *Bride of Dunbar*, and the finding of the babe. She was much more on her guard than the day before, and said that she had a shrewd suspicion as to who the babe's parents might be, but that she could not be certain without

seeing the reliquary and the scroll. Richard replied that they were at home, but made no offer of sending for them. "Nor will I do so," said he to his wife, "unless I am dealt plainly with, and the lady herself asks for them. Then should I have no right to detain them."

M. Gorion would not allow his patient to leave her room that day, and she had to remain there while Susan was in attendance on the Queen, who did not appear to her yet to have heard of the discovery, and who was entering with zest into the routine of the place, where Dr. Jones might be regarded as the supreme legislator.

Each division of the great bath hall was fitted with drying and dressing room, arranged commodiously according to the degree of those who were to use them. Royalty, of course, enjoyed a monopoly, and after the hot bath, which the Queen took immediately after rising, she breakfasted in her own apartments, and then came forth, according to the regimen of the place, by playing at *Trowle Madame.* A board with arches cut in, just big enough to permit the entrance of the balls used in playing at bowls was placed on the turf at a convenient distance from the player. Each arch was numbered, from one to thirteen, but the numbers were irregularly arranged, and the game consisted in rolling bowls into the holes in succession, each player taking a single turn, and the winner reaching the highest number first,—being, in fact, a sort of lawn bagatelle. Dr. Jones recommended it as good to stretch the rheumatic joints of his patients, and Queen Mary, an adept at all out-of-door games, delighted in it, though she had refused an offer to have the lawn arranged for it at Sheffield, saying that it would only spoil a Buxton delight. She

was still too stiff to play herself, but found infinite amusement in teaching the new-comers the game, and poor Susan, with her thoughts far away, was scarcely so apt a pupil as befitted a royal mistress, especially as she missed Mrs. Kennedy.

When she came back, she found that the dame had been sitting with the patient, and had made herself very agreeable to the girl by drawing out from her all she knew of her own story from beginning to end, having first shown that she knew of the wreck of the *Bride of Dunbar*.

"And, mother," said Cis, "she says she is nearly certain that she knows who my true parents were, and that she could be certain if she saw the swaddling clothes and tokens you had with me. Have you, mother? I never knew of them."

"Yes, child, I have. We did not wish to trouble and perturb your mind, little one, while you were content to be our daughter."

"Ah, mother, I would fain be yours and father's still. They must not take me from you. But suppose I was some great and noble lord's daughter, and had a great inheritance and lordship to give Humfrey!"

"Alas, child! Scottish inheritances are wont to bring more strife than wealth."

Nevertheless, Cis went on supposing and building castles that were pain and grief to her foreboding auditor. That evening, however, Richard called his wife. It was late, but the northern sunset was only just over, and Susan could wander out with him on the greensward in front of the Earl's house.

"So this is the tale we are to be put off with," he said, "from the Queen herself, ay, herself, and told with such an air of truth that it would almost make

me discredit the scroll. She told me with one of her sweetest smiles how a favourite kinswoman of hers wedded in secret with a faithful follower of hers, of the clan Hepburn. Oh, I assure you it might have been a ballad sung by a harper for its sadness. Well, this fellow ventured too far in her service, and had to flee to France to become an archer of the guard, while the wife remained and died at Lochleven Castle, having given birth to our Cis, whom the Queen in due time despatched to her father, he being minded to have her bred up in a French nunnery, sending her to Dunbar to be there embarked in the *Bride of Dunbar*."

"And the father?"

"Oh, forsooth, the father! It cost her as little to dispose of him as of the mother. He was killed in some brawl with the Huguenots; so that the poor child is altogether an orphan, beholden to our care, for which she thanked me with tears in her eyes, that were more true than mayhap the poor woman could help."

"Poor lady," said Susan. "Yet can it not be sooth indeed?"

"Nay, dame, that may not be. The cipher is not one that would be used in simply sending a letter to the father."

"Might not the occasion have been used for corresponding in secret with French friends?"

"I tell thee, wife, if I read one word of that letter, I read that the child was her own, and confided to the Abbess of Soissons! I will read it to thee once more ere I yield it up, that is if I ever do. Wherefore cannot the woman speak truth to me? I would be true and faithful were I trusted, but to be thus put off with lies makes a man ready at once to ride off with the whole to the Queen in council."

"Think, but think, dear sir," pleaded Susan, "how the poor lady is pressed, and how much she has to fear on all sides."

"Ay, because lies have been meat and drink to her, till she cannot speak a soothfast word nor know an honest man when she sees him."

"What would she have?"

"That Cis should remain with us as before, and still pass for our daughter, till such time as these negotiations are over, and she recover her kingdom. That is—so far as I see—like not to be till latter Lammas—but meantime what sayest thou, Susan? Ah! I knew, anything to keep the child with thee! Well, be it so—though if I had known the web we were to be wound into, I'd have sailed for the Indies with Humfrey long ago!"

CHAPTER XV.

MOTHER AND CHILD.

CICELY was well enough the next day to leave her room and come out on the summer's evening to enjoy the novel spectacle of Trowle Madame, in which she burned to participate, so soon as her shoulder should be well. It was with a foreboding heart that her adopted mother fell with her into the rear of the suite who were attending Queen Mary, as she went downstairs to walk on the lawn, and sit under a canopy whence she could watch either that game, or the shooting at the butts which was being carried on a little farther off.

"So, our bonnie maiden," said Mary, brightening as she caught sight of the young girl, "thou art come forth once more to rejoice mine eyes, a sight for sair een, as they say in Scotland," and she kissed the fresh cheeks with a tenderness that gave Susan a strange pang. Then she asked kindly after the hurt, and bade Cis sit at her feet, while she watched a match in archery between some of the younger attendants, now and then laying a caressing hand upon the slender figure.

"Little one," she said, "I would fain have thee to share my pillow. I have had no young bed-fellow

since Bess Pierrepoint left us. Wilt thou stoop to come and cheer the poor old caged bird?"

"Oh, madam, how gladly will I do so if I may!" cried Cicely, delighted.

"We will take good care of her, Mistress Talbot," said Mary, "and deliver her up to you whole and sain in the morning," and there was a quivering playfulness in her voice.

"Your Grace is the mistress," answered Susan, with a sadness not quite controlled.

"Ah! you mock me, madam. Would that I were!" returned the Queen. "It is my Lord's consent that we must ask. How say you, my Lord, may I have this maiden for my warder at night?"

Lord Shrewsbury was far from seeing any objection, and the promise was given that Cis should repair to the Queen's chamber for at least that night. She was full of excitement at the prospect.

"Why look you so sadly at me, sweet mother?" she cried, as Susan made ready her hair, and assisted her in all the arrangements for which her shoulder was still too stiff; "you do not fear that they will hurt my arm?"

"No, truly, my child. They have tender and skilful hands."

"May be they will tell me the story of my parents," said Cis; "but you need never doubt me, mother. Though I were to prove to be ever so great a lady, no one could ever be mine own mother like you!"

"Scarcely in love, my child," said Susan, as she wrapped the little figure in a loose gown, and gave her such a kiss as parents seldom permitted themselves, in the fear of "cockering" their children, which was considered to be a most reprehensible practice. Nor could she refrain from closely pressing Cicely's hand as they

passed through the corridor to the Queen's apartments, gave the word to the two yeomen who were on guard for the night at the head of the stairs, and tapped at the outmost door of the royal suite of rooms. It was opened by a French valet; but Mrs. Kennedy instantly advanced, took the maiden by the hand, and with a significant smile said: "Gramercy, madam, we will take unco gude tent of the lassie. A fair gude nicht to ye." And Mrs. Talbot felt, as she put the little hand into that of the nurse, and saw the door shut on them, as if she had virtually given up her daughter, and, oh! was it for her good?

Cis was led into the bedchamber, bright with wax tapers, though the sky was not yet dark. She heard a sound as of closing and locking double doors, while some one drew back a crimson, gold-edged velvet curtain, which she had seen several times, and which it was whispered concealed the shrine where Queen Mary performed her devotions. She had just risen from before it, at the sound of Cis's entrance, and two of her ladies, Mary Seaton and Marie de Courcelles, seemed to have been kneeling with her. She was made ready for bed, with a dark-blue velvet gown corded round her, and her hair, now very gray, braided beneath a little round cap, but a square of soft cambric drapery had been thrown over her head, so as to form a perfectly graceful veil, and shelter the features that were aging. Indeed, when Queen Mary wore the exquisite smile that now lit up her face as she held out her arms, no one ever paused to think what those lineaments really were. She held out her arms as Cis advanced bashfully, and said: "Welcome, my sweet bed-fellow, my little Scot—one more loyal subject come to me in my bondage."

Cis's impulse was to put a knee to the ground and kiss the hands that received her. "Thou art our patient," continued Mary. "I will see thee in bed ere I settle myself there." The bed was a tall, large, carved erection, with sweeping green and silver curtains, and a huge bank of lace-bordered pillows. A flight of low steps facilitated the ascent; and Cis, passive in this new scene, was made to throw off her dressing-gown and climb up.

"And now," said the Queen, "let me see the poor little shoulder that hath suffered so much."

"My arm is still bound, madam," said Cis. But she was not listened to; and Mrs. Kennedy, much to her discomfiture, turned back her under-garment. The marks were, in fact, so placed as to be entirely out of her own view, and Mrs. Susan had kept them from the knowledge or remark of any one. They were also high enough up to be quite clear from the bandages, and thus she was amazed to hear the exclamation, "There! sooth enough."

"Monsieur Gorion could swear to them instantly."

"What is it? Oh, what is it, madam?" cried Cis, affrighted; "is there anything on my back? No plague spot, I hope;" and her eyes grew round with terror.

The Queen laughed. "No plague spot, sweet one, save, perhaps, in the eyes of you Protestants, but to me they are a gladsome sight—a token I never hoped to see."

And the bewildered girl felt a pair of soft lips kiss each mark in turn, and then the covering was quickly and caressingly restored, and Mary added, "Lie down, my child, and now to bed, to bed, my maids. Put out the lights." Then, making the sign of the cross, as

Cis had seen poor Antony Babington do, the Queen, just as all the lights save one were extinguished, was divested of her wrapper and veil, and took her place beside Cis on the pillows. The two Maries left the chamber, and Jean Kennedy disposed herself on a pallet at the foot of the bed.

"And so," said the Queen, in a low voice, tender, but with a sort of banter, "she thought she had the plague spot on her little white shoulders. Didst thou really not know what marks thou bearest, little one?"

"No, madam," said Cis. "Is it what I have felt with my fingers?"

"Listen, child," said Mary. "Art thou at thine ease; thy poor shoulder resting well? There, then, give me thine hand, and I will tell thee a tale. There was a lonely castle in a lake, grim, cold, and northerly; and thither there was brought by angry men a captive woman. They had dealt with her strangely and subtilly; they had laid on her the guilt of the crimes themselves had wrought; and when she clung to the one man whom at least she thought honest, they had forced and driven her into wedding him, only that all the world might cry out upon her, forsake her, and deliver her up into those cruel hands."

There was something irresistibly pathetic in Mary's voice, and the maiden lay gazing at her with swimming eyes.

"Thou dost pity that poor lady, sweet one? There was little pity for her then! She had looked her last on her lad-bairn; ay, and they had said she had striven to poison him, and they were breeding him up to loathe the very name of his mother; yea, and to hate and persecute the Church of his father and his mother both. And so it was, that the lady vowed that if

another babe was granted to her, sprung of that last strange miserable wedlock, these foes of hers should have no part in it, nor knowledge of its very existence, but that it should be bred up beyond their ken—safe out of their reach. Ah! child; good Nurse Kennedy can best tell thee how the jealous eyes and ears were disconcerted, and in secrecy and sorrow that birth took place."

Cis's heart was beating too fast for speech, but there was a tight close pressure of the hand that Mary had placed within hers.

"The poor mother," went on the Queen in a low trembling voice, "durst have scarce one hour's joy of her first and only daughter, ere the trusty Gorion took the little one from her, to be nursed in a hut on the other side of the lake. There," continued Mary, forgetting the third person, "I hoped to have joined her, so soon as I was afoot again. The faithful lavender lent me her garments, and I was already in the boat, but the men-at-arms were rude and would have pulled down my muffler; I raised my hand to protect myself, and it was all too white. They had not let me stain it, because the dye would not befit a washerwoman. So there was I dragged back to ward again, and all our plans overthrown. And it seemed safer and meeter to put my little one out of reach of all my foes, even if it were far away from her mother's aching heart. Not one more embrace could I be granted, but my good chaplain Ross—whom the saints rest—baptized her in secret, and Gorion had set two marks on the soft flesh, which he said could never be blotted out in after years, and then her father's clanswoman, Alison Hepburn, undertook to carry her to France, with a letter of mine bound up in her swathing clothes, committing

her to the charge of my good aunt, the Abbess of Soissons, in utter secrecy, until better days should come. Alas! I thought them not so far off. I deemed that were I once beyond the clutches of Morton, Ruthven, and the rest, the loyal would rally once more round my standard, and my crown would be mine own, mine enemies and those of my Church beneath my feet. Little did I guess that my escape would only be to see them slain and routed, and that when I threw myself on the hospitality of my cousin, her tender mercies would prove such as I have found them. '*Libera me, Domine, libera me.*'"

Cis began dimly to understand, but she was still too much awed to make any demonstration, save a convulsive pressure of the Queen's hand, and the murmuring of the Latin prayer distressed her.

Presently Mary resumed. "Long, long did I hope my little one was safely sheltered from all my troubles in the dear old cloisters of Soissons, and that it was caution in my good aunt the abbess that prevented my hearing of her; but through my faithful servants, my Lord Flemyng, who had been charged to speed her from Scotland, at length let me know that the ship in which she sailed, the *Bride of Dunbar*, had been never heard of more, and was thought to have been cast away in a tempest that raged two days after she quitted Dunbar. And I—I shed some tears, but I could well believe that the innocent babe had been safely welcomed among the saints, and I could not grieve that she was, as I thought, spared from the doom that rests upon the race of Stewart. Till one week back, I gave thanks for that child of sorrow as cradled in Paradise."

Then followed a pause, and then Cis said in a low

trembling voice, "And it was from the wreck of the *Bride of Dunbar* that I was taken?"

"Thou hast said it, child! My bairn, my bonnie bairn!" and the girl was absorbed in a passionate embrace and strained convulsively to a bosom which heaved with the sobs of tempestuous emotion, and the caresses were redoubled upon her again and again with increasing fervour that almost frightened her.

"Speak to me! Speak to me! Let me hear my child's voice."

"Oh, madam——"

"Call me mother! Never have I heard that sound from my child's lips. I have borne two children, two living children, only to be stripped of both. Speak, child—let me hear thee."

Cis contrived to say "Mother, my mother," but scarcely with effusion. It was all so strange, and she could not help feeling as if Susan were the mother she knew and was at ease with. All this was much too like a dream, from which she longed to awake. And there was Mrs. Kennedy too, rising up and crying quite indignantly—"Mother indeed! Is that all thou hast to say, as though it were a task under the rod, when thou art owned for her own bairn by the fairest and most ill-used queen in Christendom? Out on thee! Have the Southron loons chilled thine heart and made thee no leal to thine ain mother that hath hungered for thee?"

The angry tones, and her sense of her own shortcomings, could only make Cis burst into tears.

"Hush, hush, nurse! thou shalt not chide my newfound bairn. She will learn to ken us better in time if they will leave her with us," said Mary. "There, there; greet not so sair, mine ain. I ask

thee not to share my sorrows and my woes. That Heaven forefend. I ask thee but to come from time to time and cheer my nights, and lie on my weary bosom to still its ache and yearning, and let me feel that I have indeed a child."

"Oh, mother, mother!" Cis cried again in a stifled voice, as one who could not utter her feelings, but not in the cold dry tone that had called forth Mrs. Kennedy's wrath. "Pardon me, I know not—I cannot say what I would. But oh! I would do anything for—for your Grace."

"All that I would ask of thee is to hold thy peace and keep our counsel. Be Cicely Talbot by day as ever. Only at night be mine—my child, my Bride, for so wast thou named after our Scottish patroness. It was a relic of her sandals that was hung about thy neck, and her ship in which thou didst sail; and lo, she heard and guarded thee, and not merely saved thee from death, but provided thee a happy joyous home and well-nurtured childhood. We must render her our thanks, my child. *Beata Brigitta, ora pro nobis.*"

"It was the good God Almighty who saved me, madam," said Cis bluntly.

"Alack! I forgot that yonder good lady could not fail to rear thee in the outer darkness of her heresy; but thou wilt come back to us, my ain wee thing! Heaven forbid that I should deny Whose Hand it was that saved thee, but it was at the blessed Bride's intercession. No doubt she reserved for me, who had turned to her in my distress, this precious consolation! But I will not vex thy little heart with debate this first night. To be mother and child is enough for us. What art thou pondering?"

"Only, madam, who was it that told your Grace that I was a stranger?"

"The marks, bairnie, the marks," said Mary. "They told their own tale to good Nurse Jeanie; ay, and to Gorion, whom we blamed for his cruelty in branding my poor little lammie."

"Ah! but," said Cicely, "did not yonder woman with the beads and bracelets bid him look?"

If it had been lighter, Cicely would have seen that the Queen was not pleased at the inquiry, but she only heard the answer from Jean's bed, "Hout no, I wad she knew nought of thae brands. How should she?"

"Nay," said Cicely, "she—no, it was Tibbott the huckster-woman told me long ago that I was not what I seemed, and that I came from the north—I cannot understand! Were they the same?"

"The bairn kens too much," said Jean. "Dinna ye deave her Grace with your speirings, my lammie. Ye'll have to learn to keep a quiet sough, and to see mickle ye canna understand here."

"Silence her not, good nurse," said the Queen, "it imports us to know this matter. What saidst thou of Tibbott?"

"She was the woman who got Antony Babington into trouble," explained Cicely. "I deemed her a witch, for she would hint strange things concerning me, but my father always believed she was a kinsman of his, who was concerned in the Rising of the North, and who, he said, had seen me brought in to Hull from the wreck."

"Ay?" said the Queen, as a sign to her to continue.

"And meseemed," added Cicely timidly, "that the strange woman at Tideswell who talked of beads and bracelets minded me of Tibbott, though she was

younger, and had not her grizzled brows; but father says that cannot be, for Master Cuthbert Langston is beyond seas at Paris."

"Soh! that is well," returned Mary, in a tone of relief. "See, child. That Langston of whom you speak was a true friend of mine. He has done much for me under many disguises, and at the time of thy birth he lived as a merchant at Hull, trading with Scotland. Thus it may have become known to him that the babe he had seen rescued from the wreck was one who had been embarked at Dunbar. But no more doth he know. The secret of thy birth, my poor bairn, was entrusted to none save a few of those about me, and all of those who are still living thou hast already seen. Lord Flemyng, who put thee on board, believed thee the child of James Hepburn of Lillieburn, the archer, and of my poor Mary Stewart, a kinswoman of mine ain; and it was in that belief doubtless that he, or Tibbott, as thou call'st him, would have spoken with thee."

"But the woman at Tideswell," said Cis, who was getting bewildered—"Diccon said that she spake to Master Gorion."

"That did she, and pointed thee out to him. It is true. She is another faithful friend of mine, and no doubt she had the secret from him. But no more questions, child. Enough that we sleep in each other's arms."

It was a strange night. Cis was more conscious of wonder, excitement, and a certain exultation, than of actual affection. She had not been bred up so as to hunger and crave for love. Indeed she had been treated with more tenderness and indulgence than was usual with people's own daughters, and her adopted parents had absorbed her undoubting love and respect.

Queen Mary's fervent caresses were at least as embarrassing as they were gratifying, because she did not know what response to make, and the novelty and wonder of the situation were absolutely distressing.

They would have been more so but for the Queen's tact. She soon saw that she was overwhelming the girl, and that time must be given for her to become accustomed to the idea. So, saying tenderly something about rest, she lay quietly, leaving Cis, as she supposed, to sleep. This, however, was impossible to the girl, except in snatches which made her have to prove to herself again and again that it was not all a dream. The last of these wakenings was by daylight, as full as the heavy curtains would admit, and she looked up into a face that was watching her with such tender wistfulness that it drew from her perforce the word "Mother."

"Ah! that is the tone with the true ring in it. I thank thee and I bless thee, my bairn," said Mary, making over her the sign of the cross, at which the maiden winced as at an incantation. Then she added, "My little maid, we must be up and stirring. Mind, no word of all this. Thou art Cicely Talbot by day, as ever, and only my child, my Bride, mine ain wee thing, my princess by night. Canst keep counsel?"

"Surely, madam," said Cis, "I have known for five years that I was a foundling on the wreck, and I never uttered a word."

Mary smiled. "This is either a very simple child or a very canny one," she said to Jean Kennedy. "Either she sees no boast in being of royal blood, or she deems that to have the mother she has found is worse than the being the nameless foundling."

"Oh! madam, mother, not so! I meant but that I had held my tongue when I had something to tell!"

"Let thy secrecy stand thee in good stead, child," said the Queen. "Remember that did the bruit once get abroad, thou wouldest assuredly be torn from me, to be mewed up where the English Queen could hinder thee from ever wedding living man. Ay, and it might bring the head of thy foster-father to the block, if he were thought to have concealed the matter. I fear me thou art too young for such a weighty secret."

"I am seventeen years old, madam," returned Cis, with dignity; "I have kept the other secret since I was twelve."

"Then thou wilt, I trust, have the wisdom not to take the princess on thee, nor to give any suspicion that we are more to one another than the caged bird and the bright linnet that comes to sing on the bars of her cage. Only, child, thou must get from Master Talbot these tokens that I hear of. Hast seen them?"

"Never, madam; indeed I knew not of them."

"I need them not to know thee for mine own, but it is not well that they should be in stranger hands. Thou canst say—But hush, we must be mum for the present."

For it became necessary to admit the Queen's morning draught of spiced milk, borne in by one of her suite who had to remain uninitiated; and from that moment no more confidences could be exchanged, until the time that Cis had to leave the Queen's chamber to join the rest of the household in the daily prayers offered in the chapel. Her dress and hair had, according to promise, been carefully attended to, but she was only finished and completed just in time to join her adopted parents on the way down the stairs. She knelt in the hall for their blessing—an action as regular and as mechanical as the morning kiss and

greeting now are between parent and child; but there was something in her face that made Susan say to herself, "She knows all."

They could not speak to one another till not only matins but breakfast were ended, and then—after the somewhat solid meal—the ladies had to put on their out-of-door gear to attend Queen Mary in her daily exercise. The dress was not much, high summer as it was, only a loose veil over the stiff cap, and a fan in the gloved hand to act as parasol. However the retirement gave Cicely an interval in which to say, "O mother, she has told me," and as Susan sat holding out her arms, the adopted child threw herself on her knees, hiding her face on that bosom where she had found comfort all her life, and where, her emotion at last finding full outlet, she sobbed without knowing why for some moments, till she started nervously at the entrance of Richard, saying, "The Queen is asking for you both. But how now? Is all told?"

"Ay," whispered his wife.

"So! And why these tears? Tell me, my maid, was not she good to thee? Doth she seek to take thee into her own keeping?"

"Oh no, sir, no," said Cis, still kneeling against the motherly knee and struggling with her sobs. "No one is to guess. I am to be Cicely Talbot all the same, till better days come to her."

"The safer and the happier for thee, child. Here are two honest hearts that will not cast thee off, even if, as I suspect, yonder lady would fain be quit of thee."

"Oh no!" burst from Cicely, then, shocked at having committed the offence of interrupting him, she added, "Dear sir, I crave your pardon, but, indeed, she is all fondness and love."

"Then what means this passion?" he asked, looking from one to the other.

"It means only that the child's senses and spirits are overcome," said Susan, "and that she scarce knows how to take this discovery. Is it not so, sweetheart?"

"Oh, sweet mother, yes in sooth. You will ever be mother to me indeed!"

"Well said, little maid!" said Richard. "Thou mightest search the world over and never hap upon such another."

"But she oweth duty to the true mother," said Susan, with her hand on the girl's neck.

"We wot well of that," answered her husband, "and I trow the first is to be secret."

"Yea, sir," said Cis, recovering herself, "none save the very few who tended her, the Queen at Lochleven, know who I verily am. Such as were aware of the babe being put on board ship at Dunbar, thought me the daughter of a Scottish archer, a Hepburn, and she, the Queen my mother, would have me pass as such to those who needs must know I am not myself."

"Trust her for making a double web when a single one would do," muttered Richard, but so that the girl could not hear.

"There is no need for any to know at present," said Susan hastily, moved perhaps by the same dislike to deception; "but ah, there's that fortune-telling woman."

Cis, proud of her secret information, here explained that Tibbott was indeed Cuthbert Langston, but not the person whose password was "beads and bracelets," and that both alike could know no more than the story of the Scottish archer and his young wife; but they were here interrupted by the appearance of Diccon, who had been sent by my Lord himself to hasten them.

at the instance of the Queen. Master Richard sent the boy on with his mother, saying he would wait and bring Cis, as she had still to compose her hair and coif, which had become somewhat disordered.

"My maiden," he said, gravely, "I have somewhat to say unto thee. Thou art in a stranger case than any woman of thy years between the four seas; nay, it may be in Christendom. It is woeful hard for thee not to be a traitor through mere lapse of tongue to thine own mother, or else to thy Queen. So I tell thee this once for all. See as little, hear as little, and, above all, say as little as thou canst."

"Not to mother?" asked Cis.

"No, not to her, above all not to me; and, my girl, pray God daily to keep thee true and loyal, and guard thee and the rest of us from snares. Now have with thee. We may tarry no longer!"

All went as usual for the rest of the day, so that the last night was like a dream, until it became plain that Cicely was again to share the royal apartment.

"Ah, I have thirsted for this hour!" said Mary, holding out her arms and drawing her daughter to her bosom. "Thou art a canny lassie, mine ain wee thing. None could have guessed from thy bearing that there was aught betwixt us."

"In sooth, madam," said the girl, "it seems that I am two maidens in one—Cis Talbot by day, and Bride of Scotland by night."

"That is well! Be all Cis Talbot by day. When there is need to dissemble, believe in thine own feigning. 'Tis for want of that art that these clumsy Southrons make themselves but a laughing-stock whenever they have a secret."

Cis did not understand the maxim, and submitted

in silence to some caresses before she said, "My father will give your Grace the tokens when we return."

"Thy father, child?"

"I crave your pardon, madam, it comes too trippingly to my tongue thus to term Master Talbot."

"So much the better. Thy tongue must not lose the trick. I did but feel a moment's fear lest thou hadst not been guarded enough with yonder sailor man, and had let him infer over much."

"O, surely, madam, you never meant me to withhold the truth from father and mother," cried Cis, in astonishment and dismay.

"Tush! silly maid!" said the Queen, really angered. "Father and mother, forsooth! Now shall we have a fresh coil! I should have known better than to have trusted thy word."

"Never would I have given my word to deceive them," cried Cis, hotly.

"Lassie!" exclaimed Jean Kennedy, "ye forget to whom ye speak."

"Nay," said Mary, recovering herself, or rather seeing how best to punish, "'tis the poor bairn who will be the sufferer. Our state cannot be worse than it is already, save that I shall lose her presence, but it pities me to think of her."

"The secret is safe with them," repeated Cis. "O madam, none are to be trusted like them."

"Tell me not," said the Queen. "The sailor's blundering loyalty will not suffer him to hold his tongue. I would lay my two lost crowns that he is down on his honest knees before my Lord craving pardon for having unwittingly fostered one of the viper brood. Then, *via!* off goes a post—boots and spurs are no doubt already on—and by and by comes Knollys,

or Carey, or Walsingham, to bear off the perilous maiden to walk in Queen Bess's train, and have her ears boxed when her Majesty is out of humour, or when she gets weary of dressing St. Katherine's hair, and weds the man of her choice, she begins to taste of prison walls, and is a captive for the rest of her days."

Cis was reduced to tears, and assurances that if the Queen would only broach the subject to Master Richard, she would perceive that he regarded as sacred, secrets that were not his own; and to show that he meant no betrayal, she repeated his advice as to seeing, hearing, and saying as little as possible.

"Wholesome counsel!" said Mary. "Cheer thee, lassie mine, I will credit whatever thou wilt of this foster-father of thine until I see it disproved; and for the good lady his wife, she hath more inward, if less outward, grace than any dame of the mastiff brood which guards our prison court! I should have warned thee that they were not excepted from those who may deem thee my poor Mary's child."

Cicely did not bethink herself that, in point of fact, she had not communicated her royal birth to her adopted parents, but that it had been assumed between them, as, indeed, they had not mentioned their previous knowledge. Mary presently proceeded—"After all, we may not have to lay too heavy a burden on their discretion. Better days are coming. One day shall our faithful lieges open the way to freedom and royalty, and thou shalt have whatever boon thou wouldst ask, even were it pardon for my Lady Shrewsbury."

"There is one question I would fain ask, Madam mother: Doth my real father yet live? The Earl of——"

Jean Kennedy made a sound of indignant warning and consternation, cutting her short in dismay; but the Queen gripped her hand tightly for some moments, and then said: "'Tis not a thing to speir of me, child, of me, the most woefully deceived and forlorn of ladies. Never have I seen nor heard from him since the parting at Carbery Hill, when he left me to bear the brunt! Folk say that he took ship for the north. Believe him dead, child. So were it best for us both; but never name him to me more."

Jean Kennedy knew, though the girl did not, what these words conveyed. If Bothwell no longer lived, there would be no need to declare the marriage null and void, and thus sacrifice his daughter's position; but supposing him to be in existence, Mary had already shown herself resolved to cancel the very irregular bonds which had united them,—a most easy matter for a member of her Church, since they had been married by a Reformed minister, and Bothwell had a living wife at the time. Of all this Cicely was absolutely ignorant, and was soon eagerly listening as the Queen spoke of her hopes of speedy deliverance. "My son, my Jamie, is working for me!" she said. "Nay, dost not ken what is in view for me?"

"No, madam, my good father, Master Richard, I mean, never tells aught that he hears in my Lord's closet."

"That is to assure me of his discretion, I trow! But this is no secret! No treason against our well-beloved cousin Bess! Oh no! But thy brother, mine ain lad-bairn, hath come to years of manhood, and hath shaken himself free of the fetters of Knox and Morton and Buchanan, and all their clamjamfrie. The Stewart lion hath been too strong for them. The

puir laddie hath true men about him, at last,— the Master of Gray, as they call him, and Esmé Stewart of Aubigny, a Scot polished as the French know how to brighten Scottish steel. Nor will the lad bide that his mother should pine longer in durance. He yearns for her, and hath writ to her and to Elizabeth offering her a share in his throne. Poor laddie, what would be *outrecuidance* in another is but duteousness in him. What will he say when we bring him a sister as well as a mother? They tell me that he is an unco scholar, but uncouth in his speech and manners, and how should it be otherwise with no woman near him save my old Lady Mar? We shall have to take him in hand to teach him fair courtesy."

"Sure he will be an old pupil!" said Cis, "if he be more than two years my elder."

"Never fear, if we can find a winsome young bride for him, trust mother, wife, and sister for moulding him to kingly bearing. We will make our home in Stirling or Linlithgow, we two, and leave Holyrood to him. I have seen too much there ever to thole the sight of those chambers, far less of the High Street of Edinburgh; but Stirling, bonnie Stirling, ay, I would fain ride a hawking there once more. Methinks a Highland breeze would put life and youth into me again. There's a little chamber opening into mine, where I will bestow thee, my Lady Bride of Scotland, for so long as I may keep thee. Ah! it will not be for long. They will be seeking thee, my brave courtly faithful kindred of Lorraine, and Scottish nobles and English lords will vie for this little hand of thine, where courses the royal blood of both realms."

"So please you, madam, my mother——"

"Eh? What is it? Who is it? I deemed that

yonder honourable dame had kept thee from all the frolics and foibles of the poor old profession. Fear not to tell me, little one. Remember thine own mother hath a heart for such matters. I guess already. *C'etait un beau garçon, ce pauvre Antoine.*"

"Oh no, madam," exclaimed Cicely. "When the sailor Goatley disclosed that I was no child of my father's, of Master Richard I mean, and was a nameless creature belonging to no one, Humfrey Talbot stood forth and pledged himself to wed me so soon as we were old enough."

"And what said the squire and dame?"

"That I should then be indeed their daughter."

"And hath the contract gone no farther?"

"No, madam. He hath been to the North with Captain Frobisher, and since that to the Western Main, and we look for his return even now."

"How long is it since this pledge, as thou callest it, was given?"

"Five years next Lammas tide, madam."

"Was it by ring or token?"

"No, madam. Our mother said we were too young, but Humfrey meant it with all his heart."

"Humfrey! That was the urchin who must needs traverse the correspondence through the seeming Tibbott, and so got Antony removed from about us. A stout lubberly Yorkshire lad, fed on beef and pudding, a true Talbot, a mere English bull-dog who will have lost all the little breeding he had, while committing spulzie and piracy at sea on his Catholic Majesty's ships. Bah, *mon enfant*, I am glad of it. Had he been a graceful young courtly page like the poor Antony, it might have been a little difficult, but a great English carle like that, whom thou hast not seen

for five years—" She made a gesture with her graceful hands as if casting away a piece of thistledown.

"Humfrey is my very good—my very good brother, madam," cried Cicely, casting about for words to defend him, and not seizing the most appropriate.

"Brother, quotha? Yea, and as good brother he shall be to thee, and welcome, so long as thou art Cis Talbot by day—but no more, child. Princesses mate not with Yorkshire esquires. When the Lady Bride takes her place in the halls of her forefathers, she will be the property of Scotland, and her hand will be sought by princes. Ah, lassie! let it not grieve thee. One thing thy mother can tell thee from her own experience. There is more bliss in mating with our equals, by the choice of others, than in following our own wild will. Thou gazest at me in wonder, but verily my happy days were with my gentle young king—and so will thine be, I pray the saints happier and more enduring than ever were mine. Nothing has ever lasted with me but captivity, *O libera me.*"

And in the murmured repetition the mother fell asleep, and the daughter, who had slumbered little the night before, could not but likewise drop into the world of soothing oblivion, though with a dull feeling of aching and yearning towards the friendly kindly Humfrey, yet with a certain exultation in the fate that seemed to be carrying her on inevitably beyond his reach.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PEAK CAVERN.

It was quite true that at this period Queen Mary had good hope of liberation in the most satisfactory manner possible—short of being hailed as English Queen. Negotiations were actually on foot with James VI. and Elizabeth for her release. James had written to her with his own hand, and she had for the first time consented to give him the title of King of Scotland. The project of her reigning jointly with him had been mooted, and each party was showing how enormous a condescension it would be in his or her eyes! Thus there was no great unlikelihood that there would be a recognition of the Lady Bride, and that she would take her position as the daughter of a queen. Therefore, when Mary contrived to speak to Master Richard Talbot and his wife in private, she was able to thank them with gracious condescension for the care they had bestowed in rearing her daughter, much as if she had voluntarily entrusted the maiden to them, saying she trusted to be in condition to reward them.

Mistress Susan's heart swelled high with pain, as though she had been thanked for her care of Humfrey or Diccon, and her husband answered, "We seek

no reward, madam. The damsel herself, while she was ours, was reward enough."

"And I must still entreat, that of your goodness you will let her remain yours for a little longer," said Mary, with a touch of imperious grace, "until this treaty is over, and I am free, it is better that she continues to pass for your daughter. The child herself has sworn to me by her great gods," said Mary, smiling with complimentary grace, "that you will preserve her secret—nay, she becomes a little fury when I express my fears lest you should have scruples."

"No, madam, this is no state secret; such as I might not with honour conceal," returned Richard.

"There is true English sense!" exclaimed Mary. "I may then count on your giving my daughter the protection of your name and your home until I can reclaim her and place her in her true position. Yea, and if your concealment should give offence, and bring you under any displeasure of my good sister, those who have so saved and tended my daughter will have the first claim to whatever I can give when restored to my kingdom."

"We are much beholden for your Grace's favour," said Richard, somewhat stiffly, "but I trust never to serve any land save mine own."

"Ah! there is your *fièreté*," cried Mary. "Happy is my sister to have subjects with such a point of honour. Happy is my child to have been bred up by such parents!"

Richard bowed. It was all a man could do at such a speech, and Mary further added, "She has told me to what bounds went your goodness to her. It is well that you acted so prudently that the children's hearts were not engaged; for, as we all know but too well, royal blood should have no heart."

"I am quite aware of it, madam," returned Richard, and there for the time the conversation ended. The Queen had been most charming, full of gratitude, and perfectly reasonable in her requests, and yet there was some flaw in the gratification of both, even while neither thought the disappointment would go very hard with their son. Richard could never divest himself of the instinctive prejudice with which soft words inspire men of his nature, and Susan's maternal heart was all in revolt against the inevitable, not merely grieving over the wrench to her affections, but full of forebodings and misgivings as to the future welfare of her adopted child. Even if the brightest hopes should be fulfilled; the destiny of a Scottish princess did not seem to Southern eyes very brilliant at the best, and whether poor Bride Hepburn might be owned as a princess at all was a doubtful matter, since, if her father lived (and he had certainly been living in 1577 in Norway), both the Queen and the Scottish people would be agreed in repudiating the marriage. Any way, Susan saw every reason to fear for the happiness and the religion alike of the child to whom she had given a mother's love. Under her grave, self-contained placid demeanour, perhaps Dame Susan was the most dejected of those at Buxton. The captive Queen had her hopes of freedom and her newly found daughter, who was as yet only a pleasure, and not an encumbrance to her, the Earl had been assured that his wife's slanders had been forgotten. He was secure of his sovereign's favour, and permitted to see the term of his weary jailorship, and thus there was an unusual liveliness and cheerfulness about the whole sojourn at Buxton, where, indeed, there was always more or less of a holiday time.

To Cis herself, her nights were like a perpetual fairy tale, and so indeed were all times when she was alone with the initiated, who were indeed all those original members of her mother's suite who had known of her birth at Lochleven, people who had kept too many perilous secrets not to be safely entrusted with this one, and whose finished habits of caution, in a moment, on the approach of a stranger, would change their manner from the deferential courtesy due to their princess, to the good-natured civility of court ladies to little Cicely Talbot.

Dame Susan had been gratified at first by the young girl's sincere assurances of unchanging affection and allegiance, and, in truth, Cis had clung the most to her with the confidence of a whole life's daughterhood, but as the days went on, and every caress and token of affection imaginable was lavished upon the maiden, every splendid augury held out to her of the future, and every story of the past detailed the charms of Mary's court life in France, seen through the vista of nearly twenty sadly contrasted years, it was in the very nature of things that Cis should regard the time spent perforce with Mistress Talbot much as a petted child views its return to the strict nurse or governess from the delights of the drawing-room. She liked to dazzle the homely housewife with the wonderful tales of French gaieties, or the splendid castles in the air she had heard in the Queen's rooms, but she resented the doubt and disapproval they sometimes excited; she was petulant and fractious at any exercise of authority from her foster-mother, and once or twice went near to betray herself by lapsing into a tone towards her which would have brought down severe personal chastisement on any real daughter even of seventeen.

It was well that the Countess and her sharp-eyed daughter Mary were out of sight, as the sight of such "cockering of a malapert maiden" would have led to interference that might have brought matters to extremity. Yet, with all the forbearance thus exercised, Susan could not but feel that the girl's love was being weaned from her; and, after all, how could she complain, since it was by the true mother? If only she could have hoped it was for the dear child's good, it would not have been so hard! But the trial was a bitter one, and not even her husband guessed how bitter it was.

The Queen meantime improved daily in health and vigour in the splendid summer weather. The rheumatism had quitted her, and she daily rode and played at Trowle Madame for hours after supper in the long bright July evenings. Cis, whose shoulder was quite well, played with great delight on the greensward, where one evening she made acquaintance with a young esquire and his sisters from the neighbourhood, who had come with their father to pay their respects to my Lord Earl, as the head of all Hallamshire. The Earl, though it was not quite according to the recent stricter rules, ventured to invite them to stay to sup with the household, and afterwards they came out with the rest upon the lawn.

Cis was walking between the young lad and his sister, laughing and talking with much animation, for she had not for some time enjoyed the pleasure of free intercourse with any of her fellow-denizens in the happy land of youth.

Dame Susan watched her with some uneasiness, and presently saw her taking them where she herself was privileged to go, but strangers were never permitted

to approach, on the Trowle Madame sward reserved for the Queen, on which she was even now entering.

"Cicely!" she called, but the young lady either did not or would not hear, and she was obliged to walk hastily forward, meet the party, and with courteous excuses turn them back from the forbidden ground. They submitted at once, apologising, but Cis, with a red spot on her cheek, cried, "The Queen would take no offence."

"That is not the matter in point, Cicely," said Dame Susan gravely. "Master and Mistress Eyre understand that we are bound to obedience to the Earl."

Master Eyre, a well-bred young gentleman, made reply that he well knew that no discourtesy was intended, but Cis pouted and muttered, evidently to the extreme amazement of Mistress Alice Eyre; and Dame Susan, to divert her attention, began to ask about the length of their ride, and the way to their home.

Cis's ill humour never lasted long, and she suddenly broke in, "O mother, Master Eyre saith there is a marvellous cavern near his father's house, all full of pendants from the roof like a minster, and great sheeted tables and statues standing up, all grand and ghostly on the floor, far better than in this Pool's Hole. He says his father will have it lighted up if we will ride over and see it."

"We are much beholden to Master Eyre," said Susan, but Cis read refusal in her tone, and began to urge her to consent.

"It must be as my husband wills," was the grave answer, and at the same time, courteously, but very decidedly, she bade the strangers farewell, and made her daughter do the same, though Cis was inclined to

resistance, and in a somewhat defiant tone added, "I shall not forget your promise, sir. I long to see the cave."

"Child, child," entreated Susan, as soon as they were out of hearing, "be on thy guard. Thou wilt betray thyself by such conduct towards me."

"But, mother, they did so long to see the Queen, and there would have been no harm in it. They are well affected, and the young gentleman is a friend of poor Master Babington."

"Nay, Cis, that is further cause that I should not let them pass onward. I marvel not at thee, my maid, but thou and thy mother queen must bear in mind that while thou passest for our daughter, and hast trust placed in thee, thou must do nothing to forfeit it or bring thy fa——, Master Richard I mean, into trouble."

"I meant no harm," said Cis, rather crossly.

"Thou didst not, but harm may be done by such as mean it the least."

"Only, mother, sweet mother," cried the girl, child-like, set upon her pleasure, "I will be as good as can be. I will transgress in nought if only thou wilt get my father to take me to see Master Eyre's cavern."

She was altogether the home daughter again in her eagerness, entreating and promising by turns with the eager curiosity of a young girl bent on an expedition, but Richard was not to be prevailed on. He had little or no acquaintance with the Eyre family, and to let them go to the cost and trouble of lighting up the cavern for the young lady's amusement would be like the encouragement of a possible suit, which would have been a most inconvenient matter. Richard did not believe the young gentleman had warrant from his

father in giving this invitation, and if he had, that was the more reason for declining it. The Eyres, then holding the royal castle of the Peak, were suspected of being secretly Roman Catholics, and though the Earl could not avoid hospitably bidding them to supper, the less any Talbot had to do with them the better, and for the present Cis must be contented to be reckoned as one.

So she had to put up with her disappointment, and she did not do so with as good a grace as she would have shown a year ago. Nay, she carried it to Queen Mary, who at night heard her gorgeous description of the wonders of the cavern, which grew in her estimation in proportion to the difficulty of seeing them, and sympathised with her disappointment at the denial.

"Nay, thou shalt not be balked," said Mary, with the old queenly habit of having her own way. "Prisoner as I am, I will accomplish this. My daughter shall have her wish."

So on the ensuing morning, when the Earl came to pay his respects, Mary assailed him with, "There is a marvellous cavern in these parts, my Lord, of which I hear great wonders."

"Does your grace mean Pool's Hole?"

"Nay, nay, my Lord. Have I not been conducted through it by Dr. Jones, and there writ my name for his delectation? This is, I hear, as a palace compared therewith."

"The Peak Cavern, Madam!" said Lord Shrewsbury, with the distaste of middle age for underground expeditions, "is four leagues hence, and a dark, damp, doleful den, most noxious for your Grace's rheumatism."

"Have you ever seen it, my Lord?"

"No, verily," returned his lordship with a shudder.

"Then you will be edified yourself, my Lord, if you

will do me the grace to escort me thither," said Mary, with the imperious suavity she well knew how to adopt.

"Madam, madam," cried the unfortunate Earl, "do but consult your physicians. They will tell you that all the benefits of the Buxton waters will be annulled by an hour in yonder subterranean hole."

"I have heard of it from several of my suite," replied Mary, "and they tell me that the work of nature on the lime-droppings is so marvellous that I shall not rest without a sight of it. Many have been instant with me to go and behold the wondrous place."

This was not untrue, but she had never thought of gratifying them in her many previous visits to Buxton. The Earl found himself obliged either to utter a harsh and unreasonable refusal, or to organise an expedition which he personally disliked extremely, and moreover distrusted, for he did not in the least believe that Queen Mary would be so set upon gratifying her curiosity about stalactites without some ulterior motive. He tried to set on Dr. Jones to persuade Messieurs Gorion and Bourgoin, her medical attendants, that the cave would be fatal to her rheumatism, but it so happened that the Peak Cavern was Dr. Jones's favourite lion, the very pride of his heart. Pool's Hole was dear to him, but the Peak Cave was far more precious, and the very idea of the Queen of Scots honouring it with her presence, and leaving behind her the flavour of her name, was so exhilarating to the little man that if the place had been ten times more damp he would have vouched for its salubrity. Moreover, he undertook that fumigations of fragrant woods should remove all peril of noxious exhalations, so that the Earl was obliged to give his orders that Mr.

Eyre should be requested to light up the cave, and heartily did he grumble and pour forth his suspicions and annoyance to his cousin Richard.

"And I," said the good sailor, "felt it hard not to be able to tell him that all was for the freak of a silly damsel."

Mistress Cicely laughed a little triumphantly. It was something like being a Queen's daughter to have been the cause of making my Lord himself bestir himself against his will. She had her own way, and might well be good-humoured. "Come, dear sir father," she said, coming up to him in a coaxing, patronising way, which once would have been quite alien to them both, "be not angered. You know nobody means treason! And, after all, 'tis not I but you that are the cause of all the turmoil. If you would but have ridden soberly out with your poor little Cis, there would have been no coil, but my Lord might have paced stately and slow up and down the terrace-walk undisturbed."

"Ah, child, child!" said Susan, vexed, though her husband could not help smiling at the arch drollery of the girl's tone and manner, "do not thou learn light mockery of all that should be honoured."

"I am not bound to honour the Earl," said Cis, proudly.

"Hush, hush!" said Richard. "I have allowed thee unchecked too long, maiden. Wert thou ten times what thou art, it would not give thee the right to mock at the gray-haired, highly-trusted noble, the head of the name thou dost bear."

"And the torment of her whom I am most bound to love," broke from Cicely petulantly.

Richard's response to this sally was to rise up,

make the young lady the lowest possible reverence, with extreme and displeased gravity, and then to quit the room. It brought the girl to her bearings at once. "Oh, mother, mother, how have I displeased him?"

"I trow thou canst not help it, child," said Susan, sadly; "but it is hard that thou shouldst bring home to us how thine heart and thine obedience are parted from us."

The maiden was in a passion of tears at once, vowing that she meant no such thing, that she loved and obeyed them as much as ever, and that if only her father would forgive her she would never wish to go near the cavern. She would beg the Queen to give up the plan at once, if only Sir Richard would be her good father as before.

Susan looked at her sadly and tenderly, but smiled, and said that what had been lightly begun could not now be dropped, and that she trusted Cis would be happy in the day's enjoyment, and remember to behave herself as a discreet maiden. "For truly," said she, "so far from discretion being to be despised by Queen's daughters, the higher the estate the greater the need thereof."

This little breeze did not prevent Cicely from setting off in high spirits, as she rode near the Queen, who declared that she wanted to enjoy *through* the merry maiden, and who was herself in a gay and joyous mood, believing that the term of her captivity was in sight, delighted with her daughter, exhilarated by the fresh breezes and rapid motion, and so mirthful that she could not help teasing and bantering the Earl a little, though all in the way of good-humoured grace.

The ride was long, about eight miles; but though the Peak Castle was a royal one, the Earl preferred not to

enter it, but, according to previous arrangement, caused the company to dismount in the valley, or rather ravine, which terminates in the cavern, where a repast was spread on the grass. It was a wonderful place, cool and refreshing, for the huge rocks on either side cast a deep shadow, seldom pierced by the rays of the sun. Lofty, solemn, and rich in dark reds and purples, rose the walls of rock, here and there softened by tapestry of ivy or projecting bushes of sycamore, mountain ash, or with fruit already assuming its brilliant tints, and jackdaws flying in and out of their holes above. Deep beds of rich ferns clothed the lower slopes, and sheets of that delicate flower, the enchanter's nightshade, reared its white blossoms down to the bank of a little clear stream that came flowing from out of the mighty yawning arch of the cavern, while above the precipice rose sheer the keep of Peak Castle.

The banquet was gracefully arranged to suit the scene, and comprised, besides more solid viands, large bowls of milk, with strawberries or cranberries floating in them. Mr. Eyre, the keeper of the castle, and his daughter did the honours, while his son superintended the lighting and fumigation of the cavern, assisted, if not directed by Dr. Jones, whose short black cloak and gold-headed cane were to be seen almost everywhere at once.

Presently clouds of smoke began to issue from the vast archway that closed the ravine. "Beware, my maidens," said the Queen, merrily, "we have roused the dragon in his den, and we shall see him come forth anon, curling his tail and belching flame."

"With a marvellous stomach for a dainty maiden or two," added Gilbert Curll, falling into her humour.

"Hark! Good lack!" cried the Queen, with an

affectation of terror, as a most extraordinary noise proceeded from the bowels of the cavern, making Cis start and Marie de Courcelles give a genuine shriek.

"Your Majesty is pleased to be merry," said the Earl, ponderously. "The sound is only the coughing of the torchbearers from the damp whereof I warned your Majesty."

"By my faith," said Mary, "I believe my Lord Earl himself fears the monster of the cavern, to whom he gives the name of Damp. Dread nothing, my Lord; the valorous knight Sir Jones is even now in conflict with the foul worm, as those cries assure me, being in fact caused by his fumigations."

The jest was duly received, and in the midst of the laughter, young Eyre came forward, bowing low, and holding his jewelled hat in his hand, while his eyes betrayed that he had recently been sneezing violently.

"So please your Majesty," he said, "the odour hath rolled away, and all is ready if you will vouchsafe to accept my poor guidance."

"How say you, my Lord?" said Mary. "Will you dare the lair of the conquered foe, or fear you to be pinched with aches and pains by his lurking hobgoblins? If so, we dispense with your attendance."

"Your Majesty knows that where she goes thither I am bound to attend her," said the rueful Earl.

"Even into the abyss!" said Mary. "Valiantly spoken, for have not Ariosto and his fellows sung of captive princesses for whom every cave held an enchanter who could spirit them away into vapour thin as air, and leave their guardians questing in vain for them?"

"Your Majesty jests with edged tools," sighed the Earl.

Old Mr. Eyre was too feeble to act as exhibitor of

the cave, and his son was deputed to lead the Queen forward. This was, of course, Lord Shrewsbury's privilege, but he was in truth beholden to her fingers for aid, as she walked eagerly forward, now and then accepting a little help from John Eyre, but in general sure-footed and exploring eagerly by the light of the numerous torches held by yeomen in the Eyre livery, one of whom was stationed wherever there was a dangerous pass or a freak of nature worth studying.

The magnificent vaulted roof grew lower, and presently it became necessary to descend a staircase, which led to a deep hollow chamber, shaped like a bell, and echoing like one. A pool of intensely black water filled it, reflecting the lights on its surface, that only enhanced its darkness, while there moved on a mysterious flat-bottomed boat, breaking them into shimmering sparks, and John Eyre intimated that the visitors must lie down flat in it to be ferried one by one over a space of about fourteen yards.

"Your Majesty will surely not attempt it," said the Earl, with a shudder.

"Wherefore not? It is but a foretaste of Charon's boat!" said Mary, who was one of those people whose spirit of enterprise rises with the occasion, and she murmured to Mary Seaton the line of Dante—

> "Quando noi fermerem li nostri passi
> Su la triste riviera a' Acheronte."

"Will your Majesty enter?" asked John Eyre. "Dr. Jones and some gentlemen wait on the other side to receive you."

"Some gentlemen?" repeated Mary. "You are sure they are not Minos and Rhadamanthus, sir? My obolus is ready; shall I put it in my mouth?"

"Nay, madam, pardon me," said the Earl, spurred

by a miserable sense of his duties; "since you will thus venture, far be it from me to let you pass over until I have reached the other side to see that it is fit for your Majesty!"

"Even as you will, most devoted cavalier," said Mary, drawing back; "we will be content to play the part of the pale ghosts of the unburied dead a little longer. See, Mary, the boat sinks down with him and his mortal flesh! We shall have Charon complaining of him anon."

"Your Highness gars my flesh grue," was the answer of her faithful Mary.

"Ah, *ma mie!* we have not left all hope behind. We can afford to smile at the doleful knight, ferried o'er on his back, in duteous and loyal submission to his task mistress. Child, Cicely, where art thou? Art afraid to dare the black river?"

"No, madam, not with you on the other side, and my father to follow me."

"Well said. Let the maiden follow next after me. Or mayhap Master Eyre should come next, then the young lady. For you, my ladies, and you, good sirs, you are free to follow or not, as the fancy strikes you. So—here is Charon once more—must I lie down?"

"Ay, madam," said Eyre, "if you would not strike your head against yonder projecting rock."

Mary lay down, her cloak drawn about her, and saying, "Now then, for Acheron. Ah! would that it were Lethe!"

"Her Grace saith well," muttered faithful Jean Kennedy, unversed in classic lore, "would that we were once more at bonnie Leith. Soft there now, 'tis you that follow her next, my fair mistress."

Cicely, not without trepidation, obeyed, laid herself

flat, and was soon midway, feeling the passage so grim and awful, that she could think of nothing but the dark passages of the grave, and was shuddering all over, when she was helped out on the other side by the Queen's own hand.

Some of those in the rear did not seem to be similarly affected, or else braved their feelings of awe by shouts and songs, which echoed fearfully through the subterranean vaults. Indeed Diccon, following the example of one or two young pages and grooms of the Earl's, began to get so daring and wild in the strange scene, that his father became anxious, and tarried for him on the other side, in the dread of his wandering away and getting lost, or falling into some of the fearful dark rivers that could be heard—not seen —rushing along. By this means, Master Richard was entirely separated from Cicely, to whom, before crossing the water, he had been watchfully attending, but he knew her to be with the Queen and her ladies, and considered her natural timidity the best safeguard against the chief peril of the cave, namely, wandering away.

Cicely did, however, miss his care, for the Queen could not but be engrossed by her various cicerones and attendants, and it was no one's especial business to look after the young girl over the rough descent to the dripping well called Roger Rain's House, and the grand cathedral-like gallery, with splendid pillars of stalagmite, and pendants above. By the time the steps beyond were reached, a toilsome descent, the Queen had had enough of the expedition, and declined to go any farther, but she good-naturedly yielded to the wish of Master John Eyre and Dr. Jones, that she would inscribe her name on the farthest column that she had reached.

There was a little confusion while this was being done, as some of the more enterprising wished to penetrate as far as possible into the recesses of the cave, and these were allowed to pass forward—Diccon and his father among them. In the passing and repassing, Cicely entirely lost sight of all who had any special care of her, and went stumbling on alone, weary, frightened, and repenting of the wilfulness with which she had urged on the expedition. Each of the other ladies had some cavalier to help her, but none had fallen to Cicely's lot, and though, to an active girl, there was no real danger where the torchbearers lined the way, still there was so much difficulty that she was a laggard in reaching the likeness of Acheron, and could see no father near as she laid herself down in Charon's dismal boat, dimly rejoicing that this time it was to return to the realms of day, and yet feeling as if she should never reach them. A hand was given to assist her from the boat by one of the torchbearers, a voice strangely familiar was in her ears, saying, "Mistress Cicely!" and she knew the eager eyes, and exclaimed under her breath, "Antony, you here? In hiding? What have you done?"

"Nothing," he answered, smiling, and holding her hand, as he helped her forward. "I only put on this garb that I might gaze once more on the most divine and persecuted of queens, and with some hope likewise that I might win a word with her who deigned once to be my playmate. Lady, I know the truth respecting you."

"Do you in very deed?" demanded Cicely, considerably startled.

"I know your true name, and that you are none of the mastiff race," said Antony.

"Did—did Tibbott tell you, sir?" asked Cicely.

"You are one of us," said Antony; "bound by natural allegiance in the land of your birth to this lady."

"Even so," said Cis, here becoming secure of what she had before doubted, that Babington only knew half the truth he referred to.

"And you see and speak with her privily," he added.

"As Bess Pierrepoint did," said she.

These words passed during the ascent, and were much interrupted by the difficulties of the way, in which Antony rendered such aid that she was each moment more impelled to trust to him, and relieved to find herself in such familiar hands. On reaching the summit the light of day could be seen glimmering in the extreme distance, and the maiden's heart bounded at the sight of it; but she found herself led somewhat aside, where in a sort of side aisle of the great bell chamber were standing together four more of the torch-bearers.

One of them, a slight man, made a step forward and said, "The Queen hath dropped her kerchief. Mayhap the young gentlewoman will restore it?"

"She will do more than that!" said Antony, drawing her into the midst of them. "Dost not know her, Langston? She is her sacred Majesty's own born, true, and faithful subject, the Lady ——"

"Hush, my friend; thou art ever over outspoken with thy names," returned the other, evidently annoyed at Babington's imprudence.

"I tell thee, she is one of us," replied Antony impatiently. "How is the Queen to know of her friends if we name them not to her?"

"Are these her friends?" asked Cicely, looking round on the five figures in the leathern coats and yeomen's heavy buskins and shoes, and especially at the narrow face and keen pale eyes of Langston.

"Ay, verily," said one, whom Cicely could see even under his disguise to be a slender, graceful youth. "By John Eyre's favour have we come together here to gaze on the true and lawful mistress of our hearts, the champion of our faith, in her martyrdom." Then taking the kerchief from Langston's hand, Babington kissed it reverently, and tore it into five pieces, which he divided among himself and his fellows, saying, "This fair mistress shall bear witness to her sacred Majesty that we—Antony Babington, Chidiock Tichborne, Cuthbert Langston, John Charnock, John Savage—regard her as the sole and lawful Queen of England and Scotland, and that as we have gone for her sake into the likeness of the valley of the shadow of death, so will we meet death itself and stain this linen with our best heart's blood rather than not bring her again to freedom and the throne!"

Then with the most solemn oath each enthusiastically kissed the white token, and put it in his breast, but Langston looked with some alarm at the girl, and said to Babington, "Doth this young lady understand that you have put our lives into her hands?"

"She knows! she knows! I answer for her with my life," said Antony.

"Let her then swear to utter no word of what she has seen save to the Queen," said Langston, and Cicely detected a glitter in that pale eye, and with a horrified leap of thought, recollected how easy it would be to drag her away into one of those black pools, beyond all ken.

"Oh save me, Antony!" she cried, clinging to his arm.

"No one shall touch you. I will guard you with my life!" exclaimed the impulsive young man, feeling for the sword that was not there.

"Who spoke of hurting the foolish wench?" growled Savage; but Tichborne said, "No one would hurt you, madam; but it is due to us all that you should give us your word of honour not to disclose what has passed, save to our only true mistress."

"Oh yes! yes!" cried Cicely hastily, scarcely knowing what passed her lips, and only anxious to escape from that gleaming eye of Langston, which had twice before filled her with a nameless sense of the necessity of terrified obedience. "Oh! let me go. I hear my father's voice."

She sprang forward with a cry between joy and terror, and darted up to Richard Talbot, while Savage, the man who looked most entirely unlike a disguised gentleman, stepped forward, and in a rough, north country dialect, averred that the young gentlewoman had lost her way.

"Poor maid," said kind Richard, gathering the two trembling little hands into one of his own broad ones. "How was it? Thanks, good fellow," and he dropped a broad piece into Savage's palm; "thou hast done good service. What, Cis, child, art quaking?"

"Hast seen any hobgoblins, Cis?" said Diccon, at her other side. "I'm sure I heard them laugh."

"Whist, Dick," said his father, putting a strong arm round the girl's waist. "See, my wench, yonder is the goodly light of day. We shall soon be there."

With all his fatherly kindness, he helped the agitated girl up the remaining ascent, as the lovely piece of blue sky between the retreating rocks grew wider, and the archway higher above them. Cis felt that

infinite repose and reliance that none else could give, yet the repose was disturbed by the pang of recollection that the secret laid on her was their first severance. It was unjust to his kindness; strange, doubtful, nay grisly, to her foreboding mind, and she shivered alike from that and the chill of the damp cavern, and then he drew her cloak more closely about her, and halted to ask for the flask of wine which one of the adventurous spirits had brought, that Queen Elizabeth's health might be drunk by her true subjects in the bowels of the earth. The wine was, of course, exhausted; but Dr. Jones bustled forward with some cordial waters which he had provided in case of anyone being struck with the chill of the cave, and Cicely was made to swallow some.

By this time she had been missed, and the little party were met by some servants sent by the Earl at the instance of the much-alarmed Queen to inquire for her. A little farther on came Mistress Talbot, in much anxiety and distress, though as Diccon ran forward to meet her, and she saw Cicely on her husband's arm, she resumed her calm and staid demeanour, and when assured that the maiden had suffered no damage, she made no special demonstrations of joy or affection. Indeed, such would have been deemed unbecoming in the presence of strangers, and disrespectful to the Queen and the Earl, who were not far off.

Mary, on the other hand, started up, held out her arms, received the truant with such vehement kisses, as might almost have betrayed their real relationship, and then reproached her, with all sorts of endearing terms, for having so terrified them all; nor would she let the girl go from her side, and kept her hand in her own.

Diccon meanwhile had succeeded in securing his

father's attention, which had been wholly given to Cicely till she was placed in the women's hands. "Father," he said, "I wis that one of the knaves with the torches who found our Cis was the woman with the beads and bracelets, ay, and Tibbott, too."

"Belike, belike, my son," said Richard. "There are folk who can take as many forms as a barnacle goose. Keep thou a sharp eye as the fellows pass out, and pull me by the cloak if thou seest him."

Of course he was not seen, and Richard, who was growing more and more cautious about bringing vague or half-proved suspicions before his Lord, decided to be silent and to watch, though he sighed to his wife that the poor child would soon be in the web.

Cis had not failed to recognise that same identity, and to feel a half-realised conviction that the Queen had not chosen to confide to her that the two female disguises both belonged to Langston. Yet the contrast between Mary's endearments and the restrained manner of Susan so impelled her towards the veritable mother, that the compunction as to the concealment she had at first experienced passed away, and her heart felt that its obligations were towards her veritable and most loving parent. She told the Queen the whole story at night, to Mary's great delight. She said she was sure her little one had something on her mind, she had so little to say of her adventure, and the next day a little privy council was contrived, in which Cicely was summoned again to tell her tale. The ladies declared they had always hoped much from their darling page, in whom they had kept up the true faith, but Sir Andrew Melville shook his head and said: "I'd misdoot ony plot where the little finger of him was. What garred the silly loon call in the young leddy ere he kenned whether she wad keep counsel?"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE EBBING WELL.

CICELY'S thirst for adventures had received a check, but the Queen, being particularly well and in good spirits, and trusting that this would be her last visit to Buxton, was inclined to enterprise, and there were long rides and hawking expeditions on the moors.

The last of these, ere leaving Buxton, brought the party to the hamlet of Barton Clough, where a loose horseshoe of the Earl's caused a halt at a little wayside smithy. Mary, always friendly and free-spoken, asked for a draught of water, and entered into conversation with the smith's rosy-cheeked wife who brought it to her, and said it was sure to be good and pure for the stream came from the Ebbing and Flowing Well, and she pointed up a steep path. Then, on a further question, she proceeded, "Has her ladyship never heard of the Ebbing Well that shows whether true love is soothfast?"

"How so?" asked the Queen. "How precious such a test might be. It would save many a maiden a broken heart, only that the poor fools would ne'er trust it."

"I have heard of it," said the Earl, "and Dr. Jones would demonstrate to your Grace that it is but a

superstition of the vulgar regarding a natural phenomenon."

"Yea, my Lord," said the smith, looking up from the horse's foot; "'tis the trade of yonder philosophers to gainsay whatever honest folk believed before them. They'll deny next that hens lay eggs, or blight rots wheat. My good wife speaks but plain truth, and we have seen it o'er and o'er again."

"What have you seen, good man?" asked Mary eagerly, and ready answer was made by the couple, who had acquired some cultivation of speech and manners by their wayside occupation, and likewise as cicerones to the spring.

"Seen, quoth the lady?" said the smith. "Why, he that is a true man and hath a true maid can quaff a draught as deep as his gullet can hold—or she that is true and hath a true love—but let one who hath a flaw in the metal, on the one side or t'other, stoop to drink, and the water shrinks away so as there's not the moistening of a lip."

"Ay: the ladies may laugh," added his wife, "but 'tis soothfast for all that."

"Hast proved it, good dame?" asked the Queen archly, for the pair were still young and well-looking enough to be jested with.

"Ay! have we not, madam?" said the dame. "Was not my man yonder, Rob, the tinker's son, whom my father and brethren, the smiths down yonder at Buxton, thought but scorn of, but we'd taken a sup together at the Ebbing Well, and it played neither of us false, so we held out against 'em all, and when they saw there was no help for it, they gave Rob the second best anvil and bellows for my portion, and here we be."

"Living witnesses to the Well," said the Queen merrily. "How say you, my Lord? I would fain see this marvel. Master Curll, will you try the venture?"

"I fear it not, madam," said the secretary, looking at the blushing Barbara.

Objections did not fail to arise from the Earl as to the difficulties of the path and the lateness of the hour, but Rob Smith, perhaps wilfully, discovered another of my Lord's horseshoes to be in a perilous state, and his good wife, Dame Emmott, offered to conduct the ladies by so good a path that they might think themselves on the Queen's Walk at Buxton itself.

Lord Shrewsbury, finding himself a prisoner, was obliged to yield compliance, and leaving Sir Andrew Melville, with the grooms and falconers, in charge of the horses, the Queen, the Earl, Cicely, Mary Seaton, Barbara Mowbray, the two secretaries, and Richard Talbot and young Diccon, started on the walk, together with Dr. Bourgoin, her physician, who was eager to investigate the curiosity, and make it a subject of debate with Dr. Jones.

The path was a beautiful one, through rocks and brushwood, mountain ash bushes showing their coral berries amid their feathery leaves, golden and white stars of stonecrop studding every coign of vantage, and in more level spots the waxy bell-heather beginning to come into blossom. Still it was rather over praise to call it as smooth as the carefully-levelled and much-trodden Queen's path at Buxton, considering that it ascended steeply all the way, and made the solemn, much-enduring Earl pant for breath; but the Queen, her rheumatics for the time entirely in abeyance, bounded on with the mountain step learned in early childhood, and closely followed the brisk Em-

mott. The last ascent was a steep pull, taking away the disposition to speak, and at its summit Mary stood still holding out one hand, with a finger of the other on her lips as a sign of silence to the rest of the suite and to Emmott, who stood flushed and angered; for what she esteemed her lawful province seemed to have been invaded from the other side of the country.

They were on the side of the descent from the moorlands connected with the Peak, on a small esplanade in the midst of which lay a deep clear pool, with nine small springs or fountains discharging themselves, under fern and wild rose or honeysuckle, into its basin. Steps had been cut in the rock leading to the verge of the pool, and on the lowest of these, with his back to the new-comers, was kneeling a young man, his brown head bare, his short cloak laid aside, so that his well-knit form could be seen; the sword and spurs that clanked against the rock, as well as the whole fashion and texture of his riding-dress, showing him to be a gentleman.

"We shall see the venture made," whispered Mary to her daughter, who, in virtue of youth and lightness of foot, had kept close behind her. Grasping the girl's arm and smiling, she heard the young man's voice cry aloud to the echoes of the rock, "Cis!" then stoop forward and plunge face and head into the clear translucent water.

"Good luck to a true lover!" smiled the Queen. "What! starting, silly maid? Cisses are plenty in these parts as rowan berries."

"Nay, but——" gasped Cicely, for at that moment the young man, rising from his knees, his face still shining with the water, looked up at his unsuspected spectators. An expression of astonishment and ecstasy

lighted up his honest sunburnt countenance as Master Richard, who had just succeeded in dragging the portly Earl up the steep path, met his gaze. He threw up his arms, made apparently but one bound, and was kneeling at the captain's feet, embracing his knees.

"My son! Humfrey! Thyself!" cried Richard. "See! see what presence we are in."

"Your blessing, father, first," cried Humfrey, "ere I can see aught else."

And as Richard quickly and thankfully laid his hand on the brow, so much fairer than the face, and then held his son for one moment in a close embrace, with an exchange of the kiss that was not then only a foreign fashion, Queen and Earl said to one another with a sigh, that happy was the household where the son had no eyes for any save his father.

Mary, however, must have found it hard to continue her smiles when, after due but hurried obeisance to her and to his feudal chief, Humfrey turned to the little figure beside her, all smiling with startled shyness, and in one moment seemed to swallow it up in a huge overpowering embrace, fraternal in the eyes of almost all the spectators, but not by any means so to those of Mary, especially after the name she had heard. Diccon's greeting was the next, and was not quite so visibly rapturous on the part of the elder brother, who explained that he had arrived at Sheffield yesterday, and finding no one to welcome him but little Edward, had set forth for Buxton almost with daylight, and having found himself obliged to rest his horse, he had turned aside to———. And here he recollected just in time that Cis was in every one's eyes save his father's, his own sister, and lamely concluded "to take a draught of water," blushing under his brown skin as

he spoke. Poor fellow! the Queen, even while she wished him in the farthest West Indian isle, could not help understanding that strange doubt and dread that come over the mind at the last moment before a longed-for meeting, and which had made even the bold young sailor glad to rally his hopes by this divination. Fortunately she thought only herself and one or two of the foremost had heard the name he gave, as was proved by the Earl's good-humoured laugh, as he said,

"A draught, quotha? We understand that, young sir. And who may this your true love be?"

"That I hope soon to make known to your Lordship," returned Humfrey, with a readiness which he certainly did not possess before his voyage.

The ceremony was still to be fulfilled, and the smith's wife called them to order by saying, "Good luck to the young gentleman. He is a stranger here, or he would have known he should have come up by our path! Will you try the well, your Grace?"

"Nay, nay, good woman, my time for such toys is over!" said the Queen smiling, "but moved by such an example, here are others to make the venture, Master Curll is burning for it, I see."

"I fear no such trial, an't please your Grace," said Curll, bowing, with a bright defiance of the water, and exchanging a confident smile with the blushing Mistress Barbara—then kneeling by the well, and uttering her name aloud ere stooping to drink. He too succeeded in obtaining a full draught, and came up triumphantly.

"The water is a flatterer!" said the Earl. "It favours all."

The French secretary, Monsieur Nau, here came forward and took his place on the steps. No one heard, but every one knew the word he spoke was "Bessie," for

Elizabeth Pierrepoint had long been the object of his affections. No doubt he hoped that he should obtain some encouragement from the water, even while he gave a little laugh of affected incredulity as though only complying with a form to amuse the Queen. Down he went on his knees, bending over the pool, when behold he could not reach it! The streams that fed it were no longer issuing from the rock, the water was subsiding rapidly. The farther he stooped, the more it retreated, till he had almost fallen over, and the guide screamed out a note of warning, "Have a care, sir! If the water flees you, flee it will, and ye'll not mend matters by drowning yourself."

How he was to be drowned by water that fled from him was not clear, but with a muttered malediction he arose and glanced round as if he thought the mortification a trick on the part of the higher powers, since the Earl did not think him a match for the Countess's grandchild, and the Queen had made it known to him that she considered Bess Pierrepoint to have too much of her grandmother's conditions to be likely to be a good wife. There was a laugh too, scarce controlled by some of the less well-mannered of the suite, especially as the Earl, wishing to punish his presumption, loudly set the example.

There was a pause, as the discomfited secretary came back, and the guide exclaimed, "Come, my masters, be not daunted! Will none of you come on? Hath none of you faith in your love? Oh, fie!"

"We are married men, good women," said Richard, hoping to put an end to the scene, "and thus can laugh at your well."

"But will not these pretty ladies try it? It speaks as sooth to lass as to lad."

"I am ready," said Barbara Mowbray, as Curll gave her his hand to bound lightly down the steps. And to the general amazement, no sooner had "Gilbert" echoed from her lips than the fountains again burst forth, the water rose, and she had no difficulty in reaching it, while no one could help bursting forth in applause. Her Gilbert fervently kissed the hand she gave him to aid her steps up the slope, and Dame Emmott, in triumphant congratulation, scanned them over and exclaimed, "Ay, trust the well for knowing true sweetheart and true maid. Come you next, fair mistress?" Poor Mary Seaton shook her head, with a look that the kindly woman understood, and she turned towards Cicely, who had a girl's unthinking impulse of curiosity, and had already put her hand into Humfrey's, when his father exclaimed, "Nay, nay, the maid is yet too young!" and the Queen added, "Come back, thou silly little one, these tests be not for babes like thee."

She was forced to be obedient, but she pouted a little as she was absolutely held fast by Richard Talbot's strong hand. Humfrey was disappointed too; but all was bright with him just then, and as the party turned to make the descent, he said to her, "It matters not, little Cis! I'm sure of thee with the water or without, and after all, thou couldst but have whispered my name, till my father lets us speak all out!"

They were too much hemmed in by other people for a private word, and a little mischievous banter was going on with Sir Andrew Melville, who was supposed to have a grave elderly courtship with Mistress Kennedy. Humfrey was left in the absolute bliss of ignorance, while the old habit and instinct of joy and gladness in his presence reasserted itself in Cis, so

that, as he handed her down the rocks, she answered in the old tone all his inquiries about his mother, and all else that concerned them at home, Diccon meantime risking his limbs by scrambling outside the path, to keep abreast of his brother, and to put in his word whenever he could.

On reaching the smithy, Humfrey had to go round another way to fetch his horse, and could hardly hope to come up with the rest before they reached Buxton. His brother was spared to go with him, but his father was too important a part of the escort to be spared. So Cicely rode near the Queen, and heard no more except the Earl's version of Dr. Jones's explanation of the intermitting spring. They reached home only just in time to prepare for supper, and the two youths appeared almost simultaneously, so that Mistress Talbot, sitting at her needle on the broad terrace in front of the Earl's lodge, beheld to her amazement and delight the figure that, grown and altered as it was, she recognised in an instant. In another second Humfrey had sprung from his horse, rushed up the steps, he knew not how, and the Queen, with tears trembling in her eyes was saying, "Ah, Melville! see how sons meet their mothers!"

The great clock was striking seven, a preposterously late hour for supper, and etiquette was stronger than sentiment or perplexity. Every one hastened to assume an evening toilette, for a riding-dress would have been an insult to the Earl, and the bell soon clanged to call them down to their places in the hall. Even Humfrey had brought in his cloak-bag wherewithal to make himself presentable, and soon appeared, a well-knit and active figure, in a plain dark blue jerkin, with white slashes, and long hose knitted by his mother's

dainty fingers, and well-preserved shoes with blue rosettes, and a flat blue velvet cap, with an exquisite black and sapphire feather in it fastened by a curious brooch. His hair was so short that its naturally strong curl could hardly be seen, his ruddy sunburnt face could hardly be called handsome, but it was full of frankness and intelligence, and beaming with honest joy, and close to him moved little Diccon, hardly able to repress his ecstasy within company bounds, and letting it find vent in odd little gestures, wriggling with his body, playing tunes on his knee, or making dancing-steps with his feet.

Lord Shrewsbury welcomed his young kinsman as one who had grown from a mere boy into a sturdy and effective supporter. He made the new-comer sit near him, and asked many questions, so that Humfrey was the chief speaker all supper time, with here and there a note from his father, the only person who had made the same voyage. All heard with eager interest of the voyage, the weeds in the Gulf Stream, the strange birds and fishes, of Walter Raleigh's Virginian colony and its ill success, of the half-starved men whom Sir Richard Grenville had found only too ready to leave Roanoake, of dark-skinned Indians, of chases of Spanish ships, of the Peak of Teneriffe rising white from the waves, of phosphorescent seas, of storms, and of shark-catching.

Supper over, the audience again gathered round the young traveller, a perfect fountain of various and wonderful information to those who had for the most part never seen a book of travels. He narrated simply and well, without his boyish shy embarrassment and awkwardness, and likewise, as his father alone could judge, without boasting, though, if to no one else, to Diccon

and Cis, listening with wide open eyes, he seemed a hero of heroes. In the midst of his narration a message came that the Queen of Scots requested the presence of Mistress Cicely. Humfrey stared in discomfiture, and asked when she would return.

"Not to-night," faltered the girl, and the mother added, for the benefit of the bystanders, "For lack of other ladies of the household, much service hath of late fallen to Cicely and myself, and she shares the Queen's chamber."

Humfrey had to submit to exchange good-nights with Cicely, and she made her way less willingly than usual to the apartments of the Queen, who was being made ready for her bed. "Here comes our truant," she exclaimed as the maiden entered. "I sent to rescue thee from the western seafarer who had clawed thee in his tarry clutch. Thou didst act the sister's part passing well. I hear my Lord and all his *meiné* have been sitting, open-mouthed, hearkening to his tales of savages and cannibals."

"O madam, he told us of such lovely isles," said Cis. "The sea, he said, is blue, bluer than we can conceive, with white waves of dazzling surf, breaking on islands fringed with white shells and coral, and with palms, their tops like the biggest ferns in the brake, and laden with red golden fruit as big as goose eggs. And the birds! O madam, my mother, the birds! They are small, small as our butterflies and beetles, and they hang hovering and quivering over a flower so that Humfrey thought they were moths, for he saw nothing but a whizzing and a whirring till he smote the pretty thing dead, and then he said that I should have wept for pity, for it was a little bird with a long bill, and a breast that shines

red in one light, purple in another, and flame-coloured in a third. He has brought home the little skin and feathers of it for me."

"Thou hast supped full of travellers' tales, my simple child."

"Yea, madam, but my Lord listened, and made Humfrey sit beside him, and made much of him—my Lord himself! I would fain bring him to you, madam. It is so wondrous to hear him tell of the Red Men with crowns of feathers and belts of beads. Such gentle savages they be, and their chiefs as courteous and stately as any of our princes, and yet those cruel Spaniards make them slaves and force them to dig in mines, so that they die and perish under their hands."

"And better so than that they should not come to the knowledge of the faith," said Mary.

"I forgot that your Grace loves the Spaniards," said Cis, much in the tone in which she might have spoken of a taste in her Grace for spiders, adders, or any other noxious animal.

"One day my child will grow out of her little heretic prejudices, and learn to love her mother's staunch friends, the champions of Holy Church, and the representatives of true knighthood in these degenerate days. Ah, child! couldst thou but see a true Spanish caballero, or again, could I but show thee my noble cousin of Guise, then wouldst thou know how to rate these gross clownish English mastiffs who now turn thy silly little brain. Ah, that thou couldst once meet a true prince!"

"The well," murmured Cicely.

"Tush, child," said the Queen, amused. "What of that? Thy name is not Cis, is it? 'Tis only the slough that serves thee for the nonce. The good youth will find himself linked to some homely, housewifely

Cis in due time, when the Princess Bride is queening it in France or Austria, and will own that the well was wiser than he."

Poor Cis! If her inmost heart declared Humfrey Talbot to be prince enough for her, she durst not entertain the sentiment, not knowing whether it were unworthy, and while Marie de Courcelles read aloud a French legend of a saint to soothe the Queen to sleep, she lay longing after the more sympathetic mother, and wondering what was passing in the hall.

Richard Talbot had communed with his wife's eyes, and made up his mind that Humfrey should know the full truth before the Queen should enjoin his being put off with the story of the parentage she had invented for Bride Hepburn; and while some of the gentlemen followed their habit of sitting late over the wine cup, he craved their leave to have his son to himself a little while, and took him out in the summer twilight on the greensward, going through the guards, for whom he, as the gentleman warder, had the password of the night. In compliment to the expedition of the day it had been made "True love and the Flowing Well." It sounded agreeable in Humfrey's ears; he repeated it again, and then added "Little Cis! she hath come to woman's estate, and she hath caught some of the captive lady's pretty tricks of the head and hands. How long hath she been so thick with her?"

"Since this journey. I have to speak with thee, my son."

"I wait your pleasure, sir," said Humfrey, and as his father paused a moment ere communicating his strange tidings, he rendered the matter less easy by saying, "I guess your purpose. If I may at once wed my little Cis I will send word to Sir John Norreys that

I am not for this expedition to the Low Countries, though there is good and manly work to be done there, and I have the offer of a command, but I gave not my word till I knew your will, and whether we might wed at once."

"Thou hast much to hear, my son."

"Nay, surely no one has come between!" exclaimed Humfrey. "Methought she was less frank and more coy than of old. If that sneaking traitor Babington hath been making up to her I will slit his false gullet for him."

"Hush, hush, Humfrey! thy seafaring boasts skill not here. No *man* hath come between thee and yonder poor maid."

"Poor! You mean not that she is sickly. Were she so, I would so tend her that she should be well for mere tenderness. But no, she was the very image of health. No man, said you, father? Then it is a woman. Ah! my Lady Countess is it, bent on making her match her own way? Sir, you are too good and upright to let a tyrannous dame like that sever between us, though she be near of kin to us. My mother might scruple to cross her, but you have seen the world, sir."

"My lad, you are right in that it is a woman who stands between you and Cis, but it is not the Countess. None would have the right to do so, save the maiden's own mother."

"Her mother! You have discovered her lineage! Can she have ought against me?—I, your son, sir, of the Talbot blood, and not ill endowed?"

"Alack, son, the Talbot may be a good dog, but the lioness will scarce esteem him her mate. Riddles apart, it is proved beyond question that our little maid

is of birth as high as it is unhappy. Thou canst be secret, I know, Humfrey, and thou must be silent as the grave, for it touches my honour and the poor child's liberty."

"Who is she, then?" demanded Humfrey sharply.

His father pointed to the Queen's window. Humfrey stared at him, and muttered an ejaculation, then exclaimed, "How and when was this known?"

Richard went over the facts, giving as few names as possible, while his son stood looking down and drawing lines with the point of his sword.

"I hoped," ended the father, "that these five years' absence might have made thee forget thy childish inclination;" and as Humfrey, without raising his face, emphatically shook his head, he went on to add—"So, my dear son, meseemeth that there is no remedy, but that, for her peace and thine own, thou shouldest accept this offer of brave Norreys, and by the time the campaign is ended, they may be both safe in Scotland, out of reach of vexing thy heart, my poor boy."

"Is it so sure that her royal lineage will be owned?" muttered Humfrey. "Out on me for saying so! But sure this lady hath made light enough of her wedlock with yonder villain."

"Even so, but that was when she deemed its offspring safe beneath the waves. I fear me that, however our poor damsel be regarded, she will be treated as a mere bait and tool. If not bestowed on some foreign prince (and there hath been talk of dukes and archdukes), she may serve to tickle the pride of some Scottish thief, such as was her father."

"Sir! sir! how can you speak patiently of such profanation and cruelty? Papist butchers and Scottish thieves, for the child of your hearth! Were it not

better that I stole her safely away and wedded her in secret, so that at least she might have an honest husband?"

"Nay, his honesty would scarce be thus manifest," said Richard, "even if the maid would consent, which I think she would not. Her head is too full of her new greatness to have room for thee, my poor lad. Best that thou shouldest face the truth. And, verily, what is it but her duty to obey her mother, her true and veritable mother, Humfrey? It is but making her case harder, and adding to her griefs, to strive to awaken any inclination she may have had for thee; and therefore it is that I counsel thee, nay, I might command thee, to absent thyself while it is still needful that she remain with us, passing for our daughter."

Humfrey still traced lines with his sword in the dust. He had always been a strong-willed though an obedient and honourable boy, and his father felt that these five years had made a man of him, whom, in spite of mediæval obedience, it was not easy to dispose of arbitrarily.

"There's no haste," he muttered. "Norreys will not go till my Lord of Leicester's commission be made out. It is five years since I was at home."

"My son, thou knowest that I would not send thee from me willingly. I had not done so ere now, but that it was well for thee to know the world and men, and Sheffield is a mere nest of intrigue and falsehood, where even if one keeps one's integrity, it is hard to be believed. But for my Lord, thy mother, and my poor folk, I would gladly go with thee to strike honest downright blows at a foe I could see and feel, rather than be nothing better than a warder, and be driven

distracted with women's tongues. Why, they have even set division between my Lord and his son Gilbert, who was ever the dearest to him. Young as he is, methinks Diccon would be better away with thee than where the very air smells of plots and lies."

"I trow the Queen of Scots will not be here much longer," said Humfrey. "Men say in London that Sir Ralf Sadler is even now setting forth to take charge of her, and send my Lord to London."

"We have had such hopes too often, my son," said Richard. "Nay, she hath left us more than once, but always to fall back upon Sheffield like a weight to the ground. But she is full of hope in her son, now that he is come of age, and hath put to death her great foe, the Earl of Morton."

"The poor lady might as well put her faith in—in a jelly-fish," said Humfrey, falling on a comparison perfectly appreciated by the old sailor.

"Heh? She will get naught but stings. How knowest thou?"

"Why, do none know here that King James is in the hands of him they call the Master of Gray?"

"Queen Mary puts in him her chief hope."

"Then she hath indeed grasped a jelly-fish. Know you not, father, those proud and gay ones, with rose-coloured bladders and long blue beards—blue as the azure of a herald's coat?"

"Ay, marry I do. I remember when I was a lad, in my first voyage, laying hold on one. I warrant you I danced about till I was nearly overboard, and my arm was as big as two for three days later. Is the fellow of that sort? The false Scot."

"Look you, father, I met in London that same Johnstone who was one of this lady's gentlemen at

one time. You remember him. He breakfasted at Bridgefield once or twice ere the watch became more strict."

"Yea, I remember him. He was an honest fellow for a Scot."

"When he made out that I was the little lad he remembered, he was very courteous, and desired his commendations to you and to my mother. He had been in Scotland, and had come south in the train of this rogue, Gray. I took him to see the old *Pelican*, and we had a breakfast aboard there. He asked much after his poor Queen, whom he loves as much as ever, and when he saw I was a man he could trust, your true son, he said that he saw less hope for her than ever in Scotland—her friends have been slain or exiled, and the young generation that has grown up have learned to dread her like an incarnation of the scarlet one of Babylon. Their preachers would hail her as Satan loosed on them, and the nobles dread nothing so much as being made to disgorge the lands of the Crown and the Church, on which they are battening. As to her son, he was fain enough to break forth from one set of tutors, and the messages of France and Spain tickled his fancy—but he is nought. He is crammed with scholarship, and not without a shrewd apprehension; but, with respect be it spoken, more the stuff that court fools are made of than kings. It may be, as a learned man told Johnstone, that the shock the Queen suffered when the brutes put Davy to death before her eyes, three months ere his birth, hath damaged his constitution, for he is at the mercy of whosoever chooses to lead him, and hath no will of his own. This Master of Gray was at first inclined to the Queen's party, thinking more might be got by a reversal

of all things, but now he finds the king's men so strong in the saddle, and the Queen's French kindred like to be too busy at home to aid her, what doth he do, but list to our Queen's offers, and this ambassage of his, which hath a colour of being for Queen Mary's release, is verily to make terms with my Lord Treasurer and Sir Francis Walsingham for the pension he is to have for keeping his king in the same mind."

"Turning a son against a mother! I marvel that honourable counsellors can bring themselves to the like."

"Policy, sir, policy," said Humfrey. "And this Gray maketh a fine show of chivalry and honour, insomuch that Sir Philip Sidney himself hath desired his friendship; but, you see, the poor lady is as far from freedom as she was when first she came to Sheffield."

"She is very far from believing it, poor dame. I am sorry for her, Humfrey, more sorry than I ever thought I could be, now I have seen more of her. My Lord himself says he never knew her break a promise. How gracious she is there is no telling."

"That we always knew," said Humfrey, looking somewhat amazed, that his honoured father should have fallen under the spell of the "siren between the cold earth and moon."

"Yes, gracious, and of a wondrous constancy of mind, and evenness of temper," said Richard. "Now that thy mother and I have watched her more closely, we can testify that, weary, worn, and sick of body and of heart as she is, she never letteth a bitter or a chiding word pass her lips towards her servants. She hath nothing to lose by it. Their fidelity is proven. They would stand by her to the last, use them as she would, but assuredly their love must be doubly bound up in

her when they see how she regardeth them before herself. Let what will be said of her, son Humfrey, I shall always maintain that I never saw woman, save thine own good mother, of such evenness of condition, and sweetness of consideration for all about her, ay, and patience in adversity, such as, Heaven forbid, thy mother should ever know."

"Amen, and verily amen," said Humfrey. "Deem you then that she hath not worked her own woe?"

"Nay, lad, what saith the Scripture, 'Judge not, and ye shall not be judged'? How should I know what hath passed seventeen years back in Scotland?"

"Ay, but for present plots and intrigues, judge you her a true woman?"

"Humfrey, thou hadst once a fox in a cage. When it found it vain to dash against the bars, rememberest thou how it scratched away the earth in the rear, and then sat over the hole it had made, lest we should see it?"

"The fox, say you, sir? Then you cannot call her ought but false."

"They tell me," said Sir Richard, "that ever since an Italian named Machiavel wrote his Book of the Prince, statecraft hath been craft indeed, and princes suck in deceit with the very air they breathe. Ay, boy, it is what chiefly vexes me in the whole. I cannot doubt that she is never so happy as when there is a plot or scheme toward, not merely for her own freedom, but the utter overthrow of our own gracious Sovereign, who, if she hath kept this lady in durance, hath shielded her from her own bloodthirsty subjects. And for dissembling, I never saw her equal. Yet she, as thy mother tells me, is a pious and devout woman, who bears her troubles thus cheerfully and patiently, be-

cause she deems them a martyrdom for her religion. Ay, all women are riddles, they say, but this one the most of all!"

"Thinkest thou that she hath tampered with—with that poor maiden's faith?" asked Humfrey huskily.

"I trow not yet, my son," replied Richard; "Cis is as open as ever to thy mother, for I cannot believe she hath yet learnt to dissemble, and I greatly suspect that the Queen, hoping to return to Scotland, may be willing to keep her a Protestant, the better to win favour with her brother and the lords of his council; but if he be such a cur as thou sayest, all hope of honourable release is at an end. So thou seest, Humfrey, how it lies, and how, in my judgment, to remain here is but to wring thine own heart, and bring the wench and thyself to sore straits. I lay not my commands on thee, a man grown, but such is my opinion on the matter."

"I will not disobey you, father," said Humfrey, "but suffer me to consider the matter."

CHAPTER XVIII.

CIS OR SISTER.

Buxtona, quæ calidæ celebraris nomine lymphæ
Forte mihi post hac non adeunda, Vale.[1]

THUS wrote Queen Mary with a diamond upon her window pane, smiling as she said, "There, we will leave a *memento* over which the admirable Dr. Jones will gloat his philosophical soul. Never may I see thee more, Buxton, yet never thought I to be so happy as I have here been."

She spoke with the tenderness of farewell to the spot which had always been the pleasantest abode of the various places of durance which had been hers in England. Each year she had hoped would be her last of such visits, but on this occasion everything seemed to point to a close to the present state of things, since not only were the negotiations with Scotland apparently prosperous, but Lord Shrewsbury had obtained an absolute promise from Elizabeth that she would at all events relieve him from his onerous and expensive charge. Thus there was general cheerfulness, as the baggage was bestowed in carts and on beasts of burthen, and Mary, as she stood finishing her inscription on

[1] Buxton, of whose warm waters all men tell,
Perchance I ne'er shall see thee more, Farewell.

the window, smiled sweetly and graciously on Mistress Talbot, and gave her joy of the arrival of her towardly and hopeful son, adding, "We surprised him at the well! May his Cis, who is yet to be found, I trow, reward his lealty!"

That was all the notice Mary deigned to take of the former relations between her daughter and young Talbot. She did not choose again to beg for secrecy when she was sure to hear that she had been forestalled, and she was too consummate a judge of character not to have learnt that, though she might despise the dogged, simple straightforwardness of Richard and Susan Talbot, their honour was perfectly trustworthy. She was able for the present to keep her daughter almost entirely to herself, since, on the return to Sheffield, the former state of things was resumed. The Bridgefield family was still quartered in the Manor-house, and Mistress Talbot continued to be, as it were, Lady Warder to the captive in the place of the Countess, who obstinately refused to return while Mary was still in her husband's keeping. Cicely, as Mary's acknowledged favourite, was almost always in her apartments, except at the meals of the whole company of Shrewsbury kinsfolk and retainers, when her place was always far removed from that of Humfrey. In truth, if ever an effort might have obtained a few seconds of private conversation, a strong sense of embarrassment and perplexity made the two young people fly apart rather than come together. They knew not what they wished. Humfrey might in his secret soul long for a token that Cis remembered his faithful affection, and yet he knew that to elicit one might do her life-long injury. So, however he might crave for word or look when out of

sight of her, an honourable reluctance always withheld him from seeking any such sign in the short intervals when he could have tried to go beneath the surface. On the other hand, this apparent indifference piqued her pride, and made her stiff, cold, and almost disdainful whenever there was any approach between them. Her vanity might be flattered by the knowledge that she was beyond his reach; but it would have been still more gratified could she have discovered any symptoms of pining and languishing after her. She might peep at him from under her eyelashes in chapel and in hall; but in the former place his gaze always seemed to be on the minister, in the latter he showed no signs of flagging as a trencher companion. Both mothers thought her marvellously discreet; but neither beheld the strange tumult in her heart, where were surging pride, vanity, ambition, and wounded affection.

In a few days, Sir Ralf Sadler and his son-in-law Mr. Somer arrived at Sheffield in order to take the charge of the prisoner whilst Shrewsbury went to London. The conferences and consultations were endless and harassing, and it was finally decided that the Earl should escort her to Wingfield, and, leaving her there under charge of Sadler, should proceed to London. She made formal application for Mistress Cicely Talbot to accompany her as one of her suite, and her supposed parents could not but give their consent, but six gentlewomen had been already enumerated, and the authorities would not consent to her taking any more ladies with her, and decreed that Mistress Cicely must remain at home.

"This unkindness has made the parting from this place less joyous than I looked for," said Mary, "but

courage, *ma mignonne.* Soon shall I send for thee to Scotland, and there shalt thou burst thine husk, and show thyself in thy true colours;" and turning to Susan, "Madam, I must commit my treasure to her who has so long watched over her."

"Your Grace knows that she is no less my treasure," said Susan.

"I should have known it well," returned the Queen, "from the innocence and guilelessness of the damsel. None save such a mother as Mistress Talbot could have made her what she is. Credit me, madam, I have looked well into her heart, and found nought to undo there. You have bred her up better than her poor mother could have done, and I gladly entrust her once more to your care, assured that your well-tried honour will keep her in mind of what she is, and to what she may be called."

"She shall remember it, madam," said Susan.

"When I am a Queen once more," said Mary, "all I can give will seem too poor a meed for what you have been to my child. Even as Queen of Scotland or England itself, my power would be small in comparison with my will. My gratitude, however, no bounds can limit out to me."

And with tears of tenderness and thankfulness she kissed the cheeks and lips of good Mistress Talbot, who could not but likewise weep for the mother thus compelled to part with her child.

The night was partly spent in caresses and promises of the brilliant reception preparing in Scotland, with auguries of the splendid marriage in store, with a Prince of Lorraine, or even with an Archduke.

Cis was still young enough to dream of such a lot as an opening to a fairy land of princely glories. If

her mother knew better, she still looked tenderly back on her *beau pays de France* with that halo of brightness which is formed only in childhood and youth. Moreover, it might be desirable to enhance such aspiration as might best secure the young princess from anything derogatory to her real rank, while she was strongly warned against betraying it, and especially against any assumption of dignity should she ever hear of her mother's release, reception, and recognition in Scotland. For whatever might be the maternal longings, it would be needful to feel the way and prepare the ground for the acknowledgment of Bothwell's daughter in Scotland, while the knowledge of her existence in England would almost surely lead to her being detained as a hostage. She likewise warned the maiden never to regard any letter or billet from her as fully read till it had been held—without witnesses—to the fire.

Of Humfrey Talbot, Queen Mary scorned to say anything, or to utter a syllable that she thought a daughter of Scotland needed a warning against a petty English sailor. Indeed, she had confidence that the youth's parents would view the attachment as quite as undesirable for him as for the young princess, and would guard against it for his sake as much as for hers.

The true parting took place ere the household was astir. Afterwards, Mary, fully equipped for travelling, in a dark cloth riding-dress and hood, came across to the great hall of the Manor-house, and there sat while each one of the attendants filed in procession, as it were, before her. To each lady she presented some small token wrought by her own hands. To each gentleman she also gave some trinket, such as the elaborate dress of the time permitted, and to each serving man or maid a

piece of money. Of each one she gravely but gently besought pardon for all the displeasures or offences she might have caused them, and as they replied, kissing her hand, many of them with tears, she returned a kiss on the brow to each woman and an entreaty to be remembered in their prayers, and a like request, with a pressure of the hand, to each man or boy.

It must have been a tedious ceremony, and yet to every one it seemed as if Mary put her whole heart into it, and to any to whom she owed special thanks they were freely paid.

The whole was only over by an hour before noon. Then she partook of a manchet and a cup of wine, drinking, with liquid eyes, to the health and prosperity of her good host, and to the restoration of his family peace, which she had so sorely, though unwittingly, disturbed.

Then she let him hand her out, once more kissing Susan Talbot and Cis, who was weeping bitterly, and whispering to the latter, "Not over much grief, *ma petite;* not more than may befit, *ma mignonne.*"

Lord Shrewsbury lifted her on her horse, and, with him on one side and Sir Ralf Sadler on the other, she rode down the long avenue on her way to Wingfield.

The Bridgefield family had already made their arrangements, and their horses were waiting for them amid the jubilations of Diccon and Ned. The Queen had given each of them a fair jewel, with special thanks to them for being good brothers to her dear Cis. "As if one wanted thanks for being good to one's own sister," said Ned, thrusting the delicate little ruby brooch on his mother to be taken care of till his days of foppery should set in, and he would need it for cap and plume.

"Come, Cis, we are going home at last," said Diccon. "What! thou art not breaking thine heart over yonder Scottish lady—when we are going home, home, I say, and have got rid of watch and ward for ever? Hurrah!" and he threw up his cap, and was joined in the shout by more than one of the youngsters around, for Richard and most of the elders were escorting the Queen out of the park, and Mistress Susan had been summoned on some question of household stuff. Cis, however, stood leaning against the balustrade, over which she had leant for the last glance exchanged with her mother, her face hidden in her hands and kerchief, weeping bitterly, feeling as if all the glory and excitement of the last few weeks had vanished as a dream and left her to the dreary dulness of common life, as little insignificant Cis Talbot again.

It was Humfrey who first came near, almost timidly touched her hand, and said, "Cheer up. It is but for a little while, mayhap. She will send for thee. Come, here is thine old palfrey—poor old Dapple. Let me put thee on him, and for this brief time let us feign that all is as it was, and thou art my little sister once more."

"I know not which is truth and which is dreaming," said Cis, waking up through her tears, but resigning her hand to him, and letting him lift her to her seat on the old pony which had been the playfellow of both.

If it had been an effort to Humfrey to prolong the word Cis into sister, he was rewarded for it. It gave the key-note to their intercourse, and set her at ease with him; and the idea that her present rustication was but a comedy instead of a reality was consoling in her present frame of mind. Mistress Susan, surrounded

with importunate inquirers as to household matters, and unable to escape from them, could only see that Humfrey had taken charge of the maiden, and trusted to his honour and his tact. This was, however, only the beginning of a weary and perplexing time. Nothing could restore Cis to her old place in the Bridgefield household, or make her look upon its tasks, cares, and joys as she had done only a few short months ago. Her share in them could only be acting, and she was too artless and simple to play a part. Most frequently she was listless, dull, and pining, so much inclined to despise and neglect the ordinary household occupations which befitted the daughter of the family, that her adopted mother was forced, for the sake of her incognito, to rouse, and often to scold her when any witnesses were present who would have thought Mrs. Talbot's toleration of such conduct in a daughter suspicious and unnatural.

Such reproofs were dangerous in another way, for Humfrey could not bear to hear them, and was driven nearly to the verge of disrespect and perilous approaches to implying that Cis was no ordinary person to be sharply reproved when she sat musing and sighing instead of sewing Diccon's shirts.

Even the father himself could not well brook to hear the girl blamed, and both he and Humfrey could not help treating her with a kind of deference that made the younger brothers gape and wonder what had come to Humfrey on his travels "to make him treat our Cis as a born princess."

"You irreverent varlets," said Humfrey, "you have yet to learn that every woman ought to be treated as a born princess."

"By cock and pie," said spoilt Ned, "that beats all! One's own sister!"

Whereupon Humfrey had the opportunity of venting a little of his vexation by thrashing his brother for his oath, while sharp Diccon innocently asked if men never swore by anything when at sea, and thereby nearly got another castigation for irreverent mocking of his elder brother's discipline.

At other times the girl's natural activity and high spirits gained the upper hand, and she would abandon herself without reserve to the old homely delights of Bridgefield. At the apple gathering, she was running about, screaming with joy, and pelting the boys with apples, more as she had done at thirteen than at seventeen, and when called to order she inconsistently pleaded, "Ah, mother! it is for the last time. Do but let me have my swing!" putting on a wistful and caressing look, which Susan did not withstand when the only companions were the three brothers, since Humfrey had much of her own unselfishness and self-command, resulting in a discretion that was seldom at fault.

And that discretion made him decide at a fortnight's end that his father had been right, and that it would be better for him to absent himself from where he could do no good, but only added to the general perplexity, and involved himself in the temptation of betraying the affection he knew to be hopeless.

Before, however, it was possible to fit out either Diccon or the four men who were anxious to go under the leadership of Master Humfrey of Bridgefield, the Earl and Countess of Shrewsbury were returning fully reconciled. Queen Elizabeth had made the Cavendishes ask pardon on their knees of the Earl for their slanders; and he, in his joy, had freely forgiven all. Gilbert Talbot and his wife had shared in the general

reconciliation. His elder brother's death had made him the heir apparent, and all were coming home again, including the little Lady Arbell, once more to fill the Castle and the Manor-house, and to renew the free hospitable life of a great feudal chief, or of the Queen's old courtier, with doors wide open, and no ward or suspicion.

Richard rejoiced that his sons, before going abroad, should witness the return to the old times which had been at an end before they could remember Sheffield distinctly. The whole family were drawn up as usual to receive them, when the Earl and Countess arrived first of all at the Manor-house.

The Countess looked smaller, thinner, older, perhaps a trifle more shrewish, but she had evidently suffered much, and was very glad to have recovered her husband and her home.

"So, Susan Talbot," was her salutation, "you have thriven, it seems. You have been playing the part of hostess, I hear."

"Only so far as might serve his Lordship, madam."

"And the wench, there, what call you her? Ay, Cicely. I hear the Scottish Queen hath been cockering her up and making her her bedfellow, till she hath spoilt her for a reasonable maiden. Is it so? She looks it."

"I trust not, madam," said Susan.

"She grows a strapping wench, and we must find her a good husband to curb her pride. I have a young man already in my eye for her."

"So please your Ladyship, we do not think of marrying her as yet," returned Susan, in consternation.

"Tilly vally, Susan Talbot, tell me not such folly as that. Why, the maid is over seventeen at the very

least! Save for all the coil this Scottish woman and her crew have made, I should have seen her well mated a year ago."

Here was a satisfactory prospect for Mistress Susan, bred as she had been to unquestioning submission to the Countess. There was no more to be said on that occasion, as the great lady passed on to bestow her notice on others of her little court.

Humfrey meantime had been warmly greeted by the younger men of the suite, and one of them handed him a letter which filled him with eagerness. It was from an old shipmate, who wrote, not without sanction, to inform him that Sir Francis Drake was fitting out an expedition, with the full consent of the Queen, to make a descent upon the Spaniards, and that there was no doubt that if he presented himself at Plymouth, he would obtain either the command, or at any rate the lieutenancy, of one of the numerous ships which were to be commissioned. Humfrey was before all else a sailor. He had made no engagement to Sir John Norreys, and many of the persons engaged on this expedition were already known to him. It was believed that the attack was to be upon Spain itself, and the notion filled him with ardour and excitement that almost drove Cicely out of his mind, as he laid the proposal before his father.

Richard was scarcely less excited. "You young lads are in luck," he said. "I sailed for years and never had more than a chance brush with the Don; never the chance of bearding him on his own shores!"

"Come with us, then, father," entreated Humfrey. "Sir Francis would be overjoyed to see you. You would get the choicest ship to your share."

"Nay, nay, my boy, tempt me not; I cannot leave

your mother to meet all the coils that may fall in her way! No; I'm too old. I've lost my sea legs. I leave thee to win the fame, son Humfrey!"

The decision was thus made, and Humfrey and Diccon were to start together for London first, and then for Plymouth, the second day after a great festival for the wedding of the little Alethea, daughter of Gilbert, Lord Talbot—still of very tender age—to the young heir of Arundel. The Talbot family had been precluded from holding festival for full fourteen years, or indeed from entertaining any guests, save the Commissioners sent down to confer from time to time with the captive Queen, so that it was no wonder that they were in the highest possible spirits at their release, and determined to take the first opportunity of exercising the gorgeous hospitality of the Tudor times.

Posts went out, riding round all the neighbourhood with invitations. The halls were swept and adorned with the best suit of hangings. All the gentlemen, young and old, all the keepers and verdurers, were put in requisition to slaughter all the game, quadruped and biped, that fell in their way, the village women and children were turned loose on the blackberries, cranberries, and bilberries, and all the ladies and serving-women were called on to concoct pasties of many stories high, subtilties of wonderful curiosity, sweetmeats and comfits, cakes and marchpanes worthy of Camacho's wedding, or to deck the halls with green boughs, and weave garlands of heather and red berries.

Cis absolutely insisted, so that the heads of the household gave way, on riding out with Richard and Humfrey when they had a buck to mark down in Rivelin Chase. And she set her heart on going out to gather cranberries in the park, flinging herself about

with petulant irritation when Dame Susan showed herself unwilling to permit a proceeding which was thought scarcely becoming in any well-born damsel of the period. "Ah, child, child! thou wilt have to bear worse restraints than these," she said, "if ever thou comest to thy greatness."

Cis made no answer, but threw herself into a chair and pouted.

The next morning she did not present herself at the usual hour; but just as the good mother was about to go in quest of her to her chamber, a clear voice came singing up the valley—

> "Berries to sell! berries to sell!
> Berries fresh from moorland fell!"

And there stood a girl in peasant dress, with short petticoats, stout shoes soaked in dew, a round face under black brows, and cheeks glowing in morning freshness; and a boy swung the other handle of the basket overflowing with purple berries.

It was but a shallow disguise betrayed by the two roguish faces, and the good mother was so pleased to see Cis smile merrily again, that she did not scold over the escapade.

Yet the inconsistent girl hotly refused to go up to the castle and help to make pastry for her mother's bitter and malicious foe, and Sir Richard shook his head and said she was in the right on't, and should not be compelled. So Susan found herself making lame excuses, which did not avert a sharp lecture from the Countess on the cockering of her daughter.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CLASH OF SWORDS.

FESTIVALS in the middle ages were conducted by day rather than by night, and it was a bright noonday sun that shone upon the great hall at Sheffield, bedecked with rich tapestry around the dais, where the floor was further spread with Eastern carpets. Below, the garniture of the walls was of green boughs, interspersed between stag's antlers, and the floor was strewn, in ancient fashion, with the fragrant rush.

All the tables, however, were spread with pure white napery, the difference being only in texture, but the higher table rejoiced in the wonderful extravagance of silver plates, while the lower had only trenchers. As to knives, each guest brought his or her own, and forks were not yet, but bread, in long fingers of crust, was provided to a large amount to supply the want. Splendid salt-cellars, towering as landmarks to the various degrees of guests, tankards, gilt and parcel gilt or shining with silver, perfectly swarmed along the board, and the meanest of the guests present drank from silver-rimmed cups of horn, while for the very greatest were reserved the tall, slender, opal Venice glasses, recently purchased by the Countess in London.

The pies, the glory of Yorkshire, surpassed them-

selves. The young bride and bridegroom had the felicity of contemplating one whose crust was elevated into the altar of Hymen, with their own selves united thereat, attended by numerous Cupids, made chiefly in paste and sugar, and with little wings from the feathers of the many slaughtered fowl within. As to the jellies, the devices and the subtilties, the pen refuses to describe them! It will be enough to say that the wedding itself was the least part of the entertainment. It was gone through with very few spectators in the early morning, and the guests only assembled afterwards to this mighty dinner at a somewhat earlier hour than they would now to a wedding breakfast. The sewer marshalled all the guests in pairs according to their rank, having gone through the roll with his mistress, just as the lady of the house or her aide-de-camp pairs the guests and puts cards in their plates in modern times. Every one was there who had any connection with the Earl; and Cis, though flashes of recollection of her true claims would come across her now and then, was unable to keep from being eager about her first gaiety. Perhaps the strange life she had led at Buxton, as it receded in the distance, became more and more unreal and shadowy, and she was growing back into the simple Cicely she had always believed herself. It was with perfectly girlish natural pleasure that she donned the delicate sky-blue farthingale, embroidered with white lilies by the skilful hands of the captive Queen, and the daintily-fashioned little cap of Flanders lace, and practised the pretty dancing steps which the Queen had amused herself with teaching her long ere they knew they were mother and daughter.

As Talbots, the Bridgefield family were spectators

of the wedding, after which, one by one, the seneschal paired them off. Richard was called away first, then a huge old Yorkshire knight came and bore away Mrs. Susan, and after an interval, during which the young people entertained hopes of keeping together in enviable obscurity, the following summons to the board was heard in a loud voice—

"Master Antony Babington, Esquire, of Dethick! Mistress Cicely Talbot, of Bridgefield."

Humfrey's brow grew dark with disappointment, but cleared into a friendly greeting, as there advanced a tall, slender gentleman, of the well-known fair, pink and white colouring, and yellow hair, apparelled point device in dark green velvet, with a full delicately crimped ruff, bowing low as he extended his hand to take that of the young lady, exchanging at the same time a friendly greeting with his old comrade, before leading Cis to her place.

On the whole, she was pleased. *Tête-à-têtes* with Humfrey were dreadfully embarrassing, and she felt life so flat without her nocturnal romance that she was very glad to have some one who would care to talk to her of the Queen. In point of fact, such conversation was prohibited. In the former days, when there had been much more intercourse between the Earl's household and the neighbourhood, regular cautions had been given to every member of it not to discuss the prisoner or make any communication about her habits. The younger generation who had grown up in the time of the closer captivity had never been instructed in these laws, for the simple reason that they hardly saw any one. Antony and Cicely were likewise most comfortably isolated, for she was flanked by a young esquire, who had no eyes nor ears save for the fair widow of sixteen

whom he had just led in, and Antony, by a fat and deaf lady, whose only interest was in tasting as many varieties of good cheer as she could, and trying to discover how and of what they were compounded. Knowing Mistress Cicely to be a member of the family, she once or twice referred the question to her across Antony, but getting very little satisfaction, she gave up the young lady as a bad specimen of housewifery, and was forced to be content with her own inductions.

There was plenty of time for Antony to begin with, "Are there as many conies as ever in the chase?" and to begin on a discussion of all the memories connected with the free days of childhood, the blackberry and bilberry gatherings, the hide-and-seek in the rocks and heather, the consternation when little Dick was lost, the audacious comedy with the unsuspected spectators, and all the hundred and one recollections, less memorable perhaps, but no less delightful to both. It was only thus gradually that they approached their recent encounter in the Castleton Cavern, and Antony explained how he had burnt to see his dear Queen and mistress once again, and that his friends, Tichborne and the rest, were ready to kiss every footstep she had taken, and almost worshipped him and John Eyre for contriving this mode of letting them behold the hitherto unknown object of their veneration.

All that passionate, chivalrous devotion, which in Sidney, Spenser, and many more attached itself to their great Gloriana, had in these young men, all either secretly or openly reconciled to Rome, found its object in that rival in whom Edmund Spenser only beheld his false Duessa or snowy Florimel. And, indeed, romance had in her a congenial heroine, who needed little self-blinding so to appear. Her beauty needed

no illusion to be credited. Even at her age, now over forty, the glimpse they had had in the fitful torchlight of the cavern had been ravishing, and had confirmed all they had ever heard of her witching loveliness; nor did they recollect how that very obscurity might have assisted it.

To their convictions, she was the only legitimate sovereign in the island, a confessor for their beloved Church, a captive princess and beauty driven from her throne, and kept in durance by a usurper. Thus every generous feeling was enlisted in her cause, with nothing to counterbalance them save the English hatred of the Spaniard, with whom her cause was inextricably linked; a dread of what might be inflicted on the country in the triumph of her party; and in some, a strange inconsistent personal loyalty to Elizabeth; but all these they were instructed to believe mere temptations and delusions that ought to be brushed aside as cobwebs.

Antony's Puritan tutor at Cambridge had, as Richard Talbot had foreboded, done little but add to his detestation of the Reformation, and he had since fallen in with several of the seminary priests who were circulating in England. Some were devoted and pious men, who at the utmost risk went from house to house to confirm the faith and constancy of the old families of their own communion. The saintly martyr spirit of one of these, whom Antony met in the house of a kinsman of his mother, had so wrought on him as to bring him heart and soul back to his mother's profession, in which he had been secretly nurtured in early childhood, and which had received additional confirmation at Sheffield, where Queen Mary and her ladies had always shown that they regarded him as one

of themselves, sure to return to them when he was his own master. It was not, however, of this that he spoke to Cis, but whatever she ventured to tell him of the Queen was listened to with delight as an extreme favour, which set her tongue off with all the eager pleasure of a girl, telling what she alone can tell.

All through the banquet they talked, for Babington had much to ask of all the members of the household whom he had known. And after the feast was over and the hall was cleared for dancing, Antony was still, by etiquette, her partner for the evening. The young bride and bridegroom had first to perform a stately pavise before the whole assembly in the centre of the floor, in which, poor young things, they acquitted themselves much as if they were in the dancing-master's hands. Then her father led out his mother, and *vice versâ*. The bridegroom had no grandparents, but the stately Earl handed forth his little active wiry Countess, bowing over her with a grand stiff devotion as genuine and earnest as at their wedding twenty years previously, for the reconciliation had been complete, and had restored all her ascendency over him. Theirs, as Mistress Susan exultingly agreed with a Hardwicke kinsman not seen for many years, was the grandest and most featly of all the performances. All the time each pair were performing, the others were awaiting their turn, the ladies in rows on benches or settles, the gentlemen sometimes standing before them, sometimes sitting on cushions or steps at their feet, sometimes handing them comfits of sugar or dried fruits.

The number of gentlemen was greatly in excess, so that Humfrey had no such agreeable occupation, but had to stand in a herd among other young men, watching with no gratified eye Antony Babington, in a

graceful attitude at Cicely's feet, while she conversed with him with untiring animation.

Humfrey was not the only one to remark them. Lady Shrewsbury nodded once or twice to herself as one who had discovered what she sought, and the next morning a mandate arrived at Bridgefield that Master Richard and his wife should come to speak with my Lady Countess.

Richard and his son were out of reach, having joined a party of the guests who had gone out hunting. Susan had to go alone, for she wished to keep Cicely as much as possible out of her Ladyship's sight, so she left the girl in charge of her keys, so that if father brought home any of the hunters to the midday meal, tankards and glasses might not be lacking.

The Countess's summons was to her own bower, a sort of dressing-room, within her great state bed-room, and with a small glazed window looking down into the great hall where her ladies sat at work, whence she could on occasion call down orders or directions or reproofs. Susan had known what it was to stand in dread of such a window at Chatsworth or Hardwicke, whence shrill shrieks of objurgation, followed sometimes by such missiles as pincushions, shoes, or combs. However the window was now closed, and my Lady sat in her arm-chair, as on a throne, a stool being set, to which she motioned her kinswoman.

"So! Susan Talbot," she said, "I have sent for you to do you a good turn, for you are mine own kinswoman of the Hardwicke blood, and have ever been reasonably humble and dutiful towards me and my Lord."

Mrs. Talbot did not by any means view this speech as the insult it would in these days appear to a lady

of her birth and position, but accepted it as the compliment it was intended to be.

"Thus," continued Lady Shrewsbury, "I have always cast about how to marry that daughter of yours fitly. It would have been done ere now, had not that Scottish woman's tongue made mischief between me and my Lord, but I am come home to rule my own house now, and mine own blood have the first claim on me."

The alarm always excited by a summons to speak with my Lady Countess began to acquire definite form, and Susan made answer, "Your Ladyship is very good, but I doubt me whether my husband desires to bestow Cicely in marriage as yet."

"He hath surely received no marriage proposals for her without my knowledge or my Lord's," said Bess of Hardwicke, who was prepared to strain all feudal claims to the uttermost.

"No, madam, but——"

"Tell me not that you or he have the presumption to think that my son William Cavendish or even Edward Talbot will ever cast an eye on a mere portionless country maid, not comely, nor even like the Hardwickes or the Talbots. If I thought so for a moment, never shouldst thou darken these doors again, thou ungrateful, treacherous woman."

"Neither of us ever had the thought, far less the wish," said Susan most sincerely.

"Well, thou wast ever a simple woman, Susan Talbot," said the great lady, thereby meaning truthful, "so I will e'en take thy word for it, the more readily that I made contracts for both the lads when I was at court. As to Dick Talbot not being fain to bestow her, I trow that is because ye have spent too much on

your long-legged sons to be able to lay down a portion for her, though she be your only daughter. Anan?"

For though this was quite true, Susan feeling that it was not the whole truth, made but faint response. However, the Countess went on, expecting to overpower her with gratitude. "The gentleman I mean is willing to take her in her smock, and moreover his wardship and marriage were granted to my Lord by her Majesty. Thou knowest whom I mean."

She wanted to hear a guess, and Susan actually foreboded the truth, but was too full of dismay and perplexity to do anything but shake her head as one puzzled.

"What think'st thou of Mr. Babington?" triumphantly exclaimed the Countess.

"Mr. Babington!" returned Susan. "But he is no longer a ward!"

"No. We had granted his marriage to a little niece of my Lord Treasurer's, but she died ere coming to age. Then Tom Ratcliffe's wife would have him for her daughter, a mere babe. But for that thou and thine husband have done good service while evil tongues kept me absent, and because the wench comes of our own blood, we are willing to bestow her upon him, he showing himself willing and content, as befits a lad bred in our own household."

"Madam, we are much beholden to you and my Lord, but sure Mr. Babington is more inclined to the old faith."

"Tush, woman, what of that? Thou mayst say the same of half our Northern youth! They think it grand to dabble with seminary priests in hiding, and talk big about their conscience and the like, but when they've seen a neighbour or two pay down a heavy

fine for recusancy, they think better of it, and a good wife settles their brains to jog to church to hear the parson with the rest of them."

"I fear me Cis is over young to settle any one's mind," said Susan.

"She is seventeen if she is a day," said my Lady, "and I was a wedded wife ere I saw my teens. Moreover, I will say for thee, Susan, that thou hast bred the girl as becomes one trained in my household, and unless she have been spoiled by resort to the Scottish woman, she is like to make the lad a moderately good wife, having seen nought of the unthrifty modes of the fine court dames, who queen it with standing ruffs a foot high, and coloured with turmeric, so please you, but who know no more how to bake a marchpane, or roll puff paste, than yonder messan dog!"

"She is a good girl," said Susan, "but——"

"What has the foolish wife to object now?" said the Countess. "I tell you I marked them both last eve, and though I seldom turn my mind to such follies, I saw the plain tokens of love in every look and gesture of the young springald. Nay, 'twas his countenance that put it into my mind, for I am even too good-natured — over good-natured, Susan Talbot. How now," at some sound below, springing to the little window and flinging it back, "you lazy idle wenches —what are you doing there? Is my work to stand still while you are toying with yon vile whelp? He is tangling the yarn, don't you see, thou purblind Jane Dacre, with no eyes but for ogling. There! there! Round the leg of the chair, don't you see!" and down flew a shoe, which made the poor dog howl, and his mistress catch him up. "Put him down! put him down this instant! Thomas! Davy! Here,

hang him up, I say," cried this over good-natured lady, interspersing her commands with a volley of sixteenth century Billingsgate, and ending by declaring that nothing fared well without her, and hurrying off to pounce down on the luckless damsels who had let their dog play with the embroidery yarn destined to emblazon the tapestry of Chatsworth with the achievements of Juno. The good nature was so far veritable that when she found little harm done, and had vented her wrath in strong language and boxes on the ear, she would forget her sentence upon the poor little greyhound, which Mrs. Jane Dacre had hastily conveyed out of sight during her transit downstairs. Susan was thus, to her great relief, released for the present, for guests came in before my Lady had fully completed her objurgations on her ladies, the hour of noon was nigh at hand, sounds in the court betokened the return of the huntsmen, and Susan effected her escape to her own sober old palfrey—glad that she would at least be able to take counsel with her husband on this most inconvenient proposition.

He came out to meet her at the court door, having just dismounted, and she knew by his face that she had not to give him the first intelligence of the difficulty in which they stood.

My Lord had himself spoken to him, like my Lady expecting him to be enchanted at the prospect of so good a match for his slenderly-portioned daughter, for Dethick was a fair estate, and the Babington family, though not ennobled, fully equal to a younger branch of the Talbots. However, Richard had had a less uncomfortable task than his wife, since the Earl was many degrees more reasonable than the Countess. He had shown himself somewhat offended at not meeting more

alacrity in the acceptance of his proposal, when Richard had objected on account of the young gentleman's Popish proclivities; but boldly declared that he was quite certain that the stripling had been entirely cured.

This point of the narrative had just been reached when it was interrupted by a scream, and Cicely came flying into the hall, crying, "O father, father, stop them! Humfrey and Mr. Babington! They are killing one another."

"Where?" exclaimed Richard, catching up his sword.

"In the Pleasance, father! Oh, stop them! They will slay one another! They had their swords!" and as the father was already gone, she threw herself into the mother's arms, hid her face and sobbed with fright as scarce became a princess for whom swords were for the first time crossed. "Fear not! Father will stop them," said the mother, with confidence she could only keep up outwardly by the inward cry, "God protect my boy. Father will come ere they can hurt one another."

"But how came it about?" she added, as with an arm round the trembling girl, she moved anxiously forward to know the issue.

"Oh! I know not. 'Twas Humfrey fell on him. Hark!"

"'Tis father's voice," said Susan. "Thank God! I know by the sound no harm is done! But how was it, child?"

Cis told with more coherence now, but the tears in her eyes and colour deepening: "I was taking in Humfrey's kerchiefs from the bleaching on the grass, when Master Babington—he had brought me a plume of pheasant's feathers from the hunting, and he began.

O mother, is it sooth? He said my Lord had sent him."

"That is true, my child, but you know we have no choice but to refuse thee."

"Ay, mother, and Antony knows."

"Not thy true birth, child?"

"Not that, but the other story. So he began to say that if I were favourable — Mother, do men always do like that?" Hiding her face against the trusty breast, "And when I drew back, and said I could not and would not hearken to such folly——"

"That was well, dear child."

"He *would* have it that I should have to hear him, and he went down on his knee, and snatched at my hand. And therewith came a great howl of rage like an angry lion, and Humfrey bounded right over the sweetbrier fence, and cried out, 'Off, fellow! No Papist traitor knave shall meddle with her.' And then Antony gave him back the lie for calling him traitor, and they drew their swords, and I ran away to call father, but oh! mother, I heard them clash!" and she shuddered again.

"See," said Susan, as they had reached the corner of a thick screen of yew-trees, "all is safe. There they stand, and father between them speaking to them. No, we will not go nearer, since we know that it is well with them. Men deal with each other better out of women's earshot. Ah, see, there they are giving one another their hands. All is over now."

"Humfrey stands tall, grave, and stiff! He is only doing it because father bids him," said Cicely. "Antony is much more willing."

"Poor Humfrey! he knows better than Antony how vain any hope must be of my silly little princess,"

said Susan, with a sigh for her boy. "Come in, child, and set these locks in order. The hour of noon hath long been over, and father hath not yet dined."

So they flitted out of sight as Richard and his son turned from the place of encounter, the former saying, "Son Humfrey, I had deemed thee a wiser man."

"Sir, how could a man brook seeing that fellow on his knee to her? Is it not enough to be debarred from my sweet princess myself, but I must see her beset by a Papist and traitor, fostered and encouraged too?"

"And thou couldst not rest secure in the utter impossibility of her being given to him? He is as much out of reach of her as thou art."

"He has secured my Lord and my Lady on his side!" growled Humfrey.

"My Lord is not an Amurath, nor my Lady either," said Richard, shortly. "As long as I pass for her father I have power to dispose of her, and I am not going to give another woman's daughter away without her consent."

"Yet the fellow may have her ear," said Humfrey. "I know him to be popishly inclined, and there is a web of those Romish priests all over the island, whereof this Queen holds the strands in her fingers, captive though she be. I should not wonder if she had devised this fellow's suit."

"This is the very madness of jealousy, Humfrey," said his father. "The whole matter was, as thy mother and thy Lord have both told me, simply a device of my Lady Countess's own brain."

"Babington took to it wondrous naturally," muttered Humfrey.

"That may be; but as for the lady at Wingfield, her talk to our poor maid hath been all of archdukes

and dukes. She is far too haughty to think for a moment of giving her daughter to a mere Derbyshire esquire, not even of noble blood. You may trust her for that."

This pacified Humfrey for a little while, especially as the bell was clanging for the meal which had been unusually deferred, and he had to hurry away to remove certain marks, which were happily the result of the sweetbrier weapons instead of that of Babington.

That a little blood had been shed was shown by the state of his sword point, but Antony had disclaimed being hurt when the master of the house came up, and in the heat of the rebuke the father and son had hardly noticed that he had thrown a kerchief round his left hand ere he moved away.

Before dinner was over, word was brought in from the door that Master Will Cavendish wanted to speak to Master Humfrey. The ladies' hearts were in their mouths, as it were, lest it should be to deliver a cartel, and they looked to the father to interfere, but he sat still, contenting himself with saying, as his son craved license to quit the board, "Use discretion as well as honour."

They were glad that the next minute Humfrey came back to call his father to the door, where Will Cavendish sat on horseback. He had come by desire of Babington, who had fully intended that the encounter should be kept secret, but some servant must have been aware of it either from the garden or the park, and the Countess had got wind of it. She had summoned Babington to her presence, before the castle barber had finished dealing with the cut in his hand, and the messenger reported that "my Lady was in one of her raging fits," and talked of throwing young Hum-

frey into a dungeon, if not having him hung for his insolence.

Babington, who had talked to his friends of a slip with his hunting-knife while disembowelling a deer, was forced to tell the fact in haste to Cavendish, the nearest at hand, begging him to hurry down and advise Humfrey to set forth at once if he did not wish his journey to be unpleasantly delayed.

"My Lord is unwilling to cross my mother at the present," said young Cavendish with half a smile; "and though it be not likely that much harm should come of the matter, yet if she laid hands on Humfrey at the present moment, there might be hindrance and vexation, so it may be well for him to set forth, in case Tony be unable to persuade my Lady that it is nought."

Will Cavendish had been a friendly comrade of both Humfrey and Antony in their boyish days, and his warning was fully to be trusted.

"I know not why I should creep off as though I had done aught that was evil," said Humfrey, drawing himself up.

"Well," said Will, "my Lord is always wroth at brawling with swords amongst us, and he might—my mother egging him on—lay you by the heels in the strong room for a week or so. Nay, for my part, methinks 'twas a strange requital of poor Babington's suit to your sister! Had she been your love instead of your sister there might have been plainer excuse, but sure you wot not of aught against Tony to warrant such heat."

"He was importuning her when she would have none of him," said Humfrey, feeling the perplexity he had drawn on himself.

"Will says well," added the father, feeling that it

by all means behoved them all to avert inquiry into the cause of Humfrey's passion, since neither Cicely's birth nor Antony's perilous inclinations could be pleaded. "To be detained a week or two might hinder thy voyage. So we will speed thee on thy way instantly."

"Tell me not where he halts for the night," said Cavendish significantly. "Fare thee well, Humfrey. I would return ere I am missed. I trust thou wilt have made the Spaniard's ships smoke, and weighted thy pouch with his dollars, before we see thee again."

"Fare thee well, Will, and thank thee kindly," returned Humfrey, as they wrung each other's hands. "And tell Antony that I thank him heartily for his thought, and owe him a good turn."

"That is well, my son," said Richard, as Cavendish rode out of the court. "Babington is both hot and weak-headed, and I fear me is in the toils of the Scottish lady; but he would never do aught that he held as disloyal by a comrade. I wish I could say the same of him anent the Queen."

"And you will guard her from him, sir?" earnestly said Humfrey.

"As I would from—I would have said Frenchman or Spaniard, but, poor maid, that may only be her hap, if her mother should come to her throne again;" and as Humfrey shrugged his shoulders at the improbability, "But we must see thee off, my boy. Poor mother! this hurries the parting for her. So best, mayhap."

It was hastily arranged that Humfrey should ride off at once, and try to overtake a squire who had been at the festival, and had invited him to turn a little out of his road and spend a day or two at his house when leaving home. Humfrey had then declined, but hos-

pitality in those days was elastic, and he had no doubt of a welcome. His father would bring Diccon and his baggage to join him there the next day.

Thus there were only a very few minutes for adieux, and, as Richard had felt, this was best for all, even the anxious mother. Cicely ran about with the rest in the stress of preparation, until Humfrey, hurrying upstairs, met her coming down with a packet of his lace cuffs in her hands.

He caught the hand on the balusters, and cried, "My princess, my princess, and art thou doing this for me?"

"Thou hast learnt fine compliments, Humfrey," said Cis, trying to do her part with quivering lips.

"Ah, Cis! thou knowest but too well what hath taught me no fine words but plain truth. Fear me not, I know what is due to thee. Cis, we never used to believe the tales and ballads that told of knights worshipping princesses beyond their reach, without a hope of more than a look—not even daring to wish for more; Cis, it is very truth. Be thou where thou wilt, with whom thou wilt, there will be one ready to serve thee to the uttermost, and never ask aught—aught but such remembrance as may befit the brother of thy childhood——"

"Mistress Cis," screamed one of the maids, "madam is waiting for those cuffs."

Cis ran down, but the squeeze and kiss on the hand remained, as it were, imprinted on it, far more than the last kiss of all, which he gave, as both knew and felt, to support his character as a brother before the assembled household.

CHAPTER XX.

WINGFIELD MANOR.

THE drawing of swords was not regarded as a heinous offence in Elizabethan days. It was not likely, under ordinary circumstances, to result in murder, and was looked on much as boxing is, or was recently, in public schools, as an evidence of high spirit, and a means of working off ill-blood.

Lady Shrewsbury was, however, much incensed at such a presumptuous reception of the suitor whom she had backed with her would-be despotic influence; and in spite of Babington's making extremely light of it, and declaring that he had himself been too forward in his suit, and the young lady's apparent fright had made her brother interfere over hastily for her protection, four yeomen were despatched by her Ladyship with orders instantly to bring back Master Humfrey Talbot to answer for himself.

They were met by Mr. Talbot with the sober reply that Master Humfrey was already set forth on his journey. The men, having no orders, never thought of pursuing him, and after a short interval Richard thought it expedient to proceed to the Manor-house to explain matters.

The Countess swooped upon him in one of her

ungovernable furies—one of those of which even Gilbert Talbot avoided writing the particulars to his father—abusing his whole household in general, and his son in particular, in the most outrageous manner, for thus receiving the favour she had done to their beggarly, ill-favoured, ill-nurtured daughter. Richard stood still and grave, his hat in his hand, as unmoved and tranquil as if he had been breasting a stiff breeze on the deck of his ship, with good sea-room and confidence in all his tackle, never even attempting to open his lips, but looking at the Countess with a steady gaze which somehow disconcerted her, for she demanded wherefore he stared at her like one of his clumsy hinds.

"Because her Ladyship does not know what she is saying," he replied.

"Darest thou! Thou traitor, thou viper, thou unhanged rascal, thou mire under my feet, thou blot on the house! Darest thou beard me—me?" screamed my Lady. "Darest thou—I say——"

If the sailor had looked one whit less calm and resolute, my Lady would have had her clenched fist on his ear, or her talons in his beard, but he was like a rock against which the billows expended themselves, and after more of the tempest than need stain these pages, she deigned to demand what he meant or had to say for his son.

"Solely this, madam, that my son had never even heard of Babington's suit, far less that he had your Ladyship's good-will. He found him kneeling to Cicely in the garden, and the girl, distressed and dismayed at his importunity. There were hot words and drawn blades. That was the whole. I parted them and saw them join hands."

"So saith Master Babington. He is willing to overlook the insult, so will I and my Lord, if you will atone for it by instantly consenting to this espousal."

"That, madam, I cannot do."

She let him say no more, and the storm had begun to rage again, when Babington took advantage of an interval to take breath, and said, "I thank you, madam, and pray you peace. If a little space be vouchsafed me, I trust to show this worthy gentleman cause wherefore he should no longer withhold his fair damsel from me."

"Indeed!" said the Countess. "Art thou so confident? I marvel what better backer thou wouldst have than me! So conceited of themselves are young men now-a-days, they think, forsooth, their own merits and graces should go farther in mating them than the word and will of their betters. There, you may go! I wash my hands of the matter. One is as ingrate as the other."

Both gentlemen accepted this amiable dismissal, each hoping that the Countess might indeed have washed her hands of their affairs. On his departure Richard was summoned into the closet of the Earl, who had carefully kept out of the way during the uproar, only trusting not to be appealed to. "My good cousin," he asked, "what means this broil between the lads? Hath Babington spoken sooth?"

"He hath spoken well and more generously than, mayhap, I thought he would have done," said Richard.

"Ay; you have judged the poor youth somewhat hardly, as if the folly of pagedom never were outgrown," said the Earl. "I put him under governorship such as to drive out of his silly pate all the wiles that he was fed upon here. You will see him prove

himself an honest Protestant and good subject yet, and be glad enough to give him your daughter. So he was too hot a lover for Master Humfrey's notions, eh ?" said my Lord, laughing a little. "The varlet! He was over prompt to protect his sister, yet 'twas a fault on the right side, and I am sorry there was such a noise about it that he should have gone without leave-takings."

"He will be glad to hear of your Lordship's goodness. I shall go after him to-morrow and take his mails and little Diccon to him."

"That is well," said the Earl. "And give him this, with his kinsman's good wishes that he may win ten times more from the Don," pushing towards Richard a packet of twenty broad gold pieces, stamped with Queen Bess in all her glory; and then, after receiving due thanks for the gift, which was meant half as friendly feudal patronage from the head of the family, half as a contribution to the royal service, the Earl added, "I would crave of thee, Richard, to extend thy journey to Wingfield. Here are some accounts of which I could not sooner get the items, to be discharged between me and the lady there—and I would fain send thee as the man whom I can most entirely trust. I will give thee a pass, and a letter to Sadler, bidding him admit thee to her presence, since there are matters here which can sooner be discharged by one word of mouth than by many weary lines of writing."

Good Master Richard's conscience had little occasion to wince, yet he could not but feel somewhat guilty when this opportune commission was given to him, since the Earl gave it unaware of his secret understanding with the captive. He accepted it, however, without hesitation, since he was certainly not going to make a mischievous use of it, and bent

all his mind to understand the complicated accounts that he was to lay before the Queen or her comptroller of the household.

He had still another interview to undergo with Antony Babington, who overtook him on his way home through the crackling leaves that strewed the avenue, as the October twilight fell. His recent conduct towards Humfrey gave him a certain right to friendly attention, though, as the frank-hearted mariner said to himself, it was hard that a plain man, who never told a lie, nor willingly had a concealment of his own, should be involved in a many-sided secret like this, a sort of web, where there was no knowing whether straining the wrong strand might not amount to a betrayal, all because he had rescued an infant, and not at once proclaimed her an alien.

"Sir," said Antony, "if my impatience to accost the maiden we wot of, when I saw her alone, had not misled me, I should have sought you first to tell you that no man knows better than I that my Lady Countess's good will is not what is wanting to forward my suit."

"Knowing then that it is not in my power or right to dispose of her, thine ardent wooing was out of place," said Richard.

"I own it, sir, though had I but had time I should have let the maiden know that I sought her subject to other approval, which I trust to obtain so as to satisfy you."

"Young man," said Richard, "listen to friendly counsel, and meddle not in perilous matters. I ask thee not whether Dethick hath any commerce with Wingfield; but I warn thee earnestly to eschew beginning again that which caused the trouble of thy childhood. Thou mayst do it innocently, seeking the con-

sent of the lady to this courtship of thine; but I tell thee, as one who knows more of the matter than thou canst, that thou wilt only meet with disappointment."

"Hath the Queen other schemes for her?" asked Babington, anxiously; and Richard, thinking of the vista of possible archdukes, replied that she had; but that he was not free to speak, though he replied to Babington's half-uttered question that his son Humfrey was by no means intended.

"Ah!" cried Antony, "you give me hope, sir. I will do her such service that she shall refuse me nothing! Sir! do you mock me!" he added, with a fierce change of note.

"My poor lad, I could not but laugh to think what a simple plotter you are, and what fine service you will render if thou utterest thy vows to the very last person who should hear them! Credit me, thou wast never made for privy schemes and conspiracies, and a Queen who can only be served by such, is no mistress for thee. Thou wilt but run thine own neck into the noose, and belike that of others."

"That will I never do," quoth Antony. "I may peril myself, but no others."

"Then the more you keep out of secrets the better. Thou art too open-hearted and unguarded for them! So speaks thy well-wisher, Antony, whose friendship thou hast won by thine honourable conduct towards my rash boy; though I tell thee plainly, the maiden is not for thee, whether as Scottish or English, Cis or Bride."

So they parted at the gate of the park, the younger man full of hope and confidence, the elder full of pitying misgiving.

He was too kind-hearted not to let Cicely know that he should see her mother, or to refuse to take a

billet for her,—a little formal note necessarily silent on the matter at issue, since it had to be laid before the Earl, who smiled at the scrupulous precaution, and let it pass.

Thus the good father parted with Humfrey and Diccon, rejoicing in his heart that they would fight with open foes, instead of struggling with the meshes of perplexity, which beset all concerned with Queen Mary, and then he turned his horse's head towards Wingfield Manor, a grand old castellated mansion of the Talbots, considered by some to excel even Sheffield. It stood high, on ground falling very steeply from the walls on three sides, and on the south well fortified, court within court, and each with a deep-arched and portcullised gateway, with loopholed turrets on either side, a porter's lodge, and yeomen guards.

Mr. Talbot had to give his name and quality, and show his pass, at each of these gates, though they were still guarded by Shrewsbury retainers, with the talbot on their sleeves. He was, however, received with the respect and courtesy due to a trusted kinsman of their lord; and Sir Ralf Sadler, a thin, elderly, careworn statesman, came to greet him at the door of the hall, and would only have been glad could he have remained a week, instead of for the single night he wished to spend at Wingfield.

Sadler was one of Mary's most gentle and courteous warders, and he spoke of her with much kindness, regretting that her health had again begun to suffer from the approach of winter, and far more from disappointment.

The negotiation with Scotland on her behalf was now known to have been abortive. James had fallen into the hands of the faction most hostile to her, and

though his mother still clung with desperate hope to the trust that he, at least, was labouring on her behalf, no one else believed that he cared for anything but his own security, and even she had been forced to perceive that her liberation was again adjourned.

"And what think you was her thought when she found that road closed up?" said Sir Ralf. "Why, for her people! Her gentlewoman, Mrs. Mowbray, hath, it seems, been long betrothed."

"Ay, to Gilbert Curll, the long-backed Scotch Secretary. They were to be wed at Stirling so soon as she arrived there again."

"Yea; but when she read the letter that overthrew her hopes, what did she say but that 'her servants must not grow gray-headed with waiting till she was set free'! So she would have me make the case known to Sir Parson, and we had them married in the parish church two days since, they being both good Protestants."

"There is no doubt that her kindness of heart is true," said Richard. "The poor folk at Sheffield and Ecclesfield will miss her plentiful almsgiving."

"Some say it ought to be hindered, for that it is but a purchasing of friends to her cause," said Sadler; "but I have not the heart to check it, and what could these of the meaner sort do to our Queen's prejudice? I take care that nothing goes among them that could hide a billet, and that none of her people have private speech with them, so no harm can ensue from her bounty."

A message here came that the Queen was ready to admit Mr. Talbot, and Richard found himself in her presence chamber, a larger and finer room than that in the lodge at Sheffield, and with splendid tapestry hangings and plenishings; but the windows all looked

into the inner quadrangle, instead of on the expanse of park, and thus, as Mary said, she felt more entirely the prisoner. This, however, was not perceptible at the time, for the autumn evening had closed in; there were two large fires burning, one at each end of the room, and tall tapestry-covered screens and high-backed settles were arranged so as to exclude the draughts around the hearth, where Mary reclined on a couch-like chair. She looked ill, and though she brightened with her sweet smile to welcome her guest, there were dark circles round her eyes, and an air of dejection in her whole appearance. She held out her hand graciously, as Richard approached, closely followed by his host; he put his knee to the ground and kissed it, as she said, "You must pardon me, Mr. Talbot, for discourtesy, if I am less agile than when we were at Buxton. You see my old foe lies in wait to plague me with aches and pains so soon as the year declines."

"I am sorry to see your Grace thus," returned Richard, standing on the step.

"The while I am glad to see you thus well, sir. And how does the good lady, your wife, and my sweet playfellow, your daughter?"

"Well, madam, I thank your Grace, and Cicely has presumed to send a billet by mine hand."

"Ah! the dear bairnie," and all the Queen's consummate art could not repress the smile of gladness and the movement of eager joy with which she held out her hand for it, so that Richard regretted its extreme brevity and unsatisfying nature, and Mary, recollecting herself in a second, added, smiling at Sadler, "Mr. Talbot knows how a poor prisoner must love the pretty playfellows that are lent to her for a time."

Sir Ralf's presence hindered any more intimate conversation, and Richard had certainly committed a solecism in giving Cicely's letter the precedence over the Earl's. The Queen, however, had recalled her caution, and inquired for the health of the Lord and Lady, and, with a certain sarcasm on her lips, trusted that the peace of the family was complete, and that they were once more setting Hallamshire the example of living together as household doves.

Her hazel eyes meantime archly scanned the face of Richard, who could not quite forget the very undovelike treatment he had received, though he could and did sturdily aver that "my Lord and my Lady were perfectly reconciled, and seemed most happy in their reunion."

Well-a-day, let us trust that there will be no further disturbances to their harmony," said Mary, "a prayer I may utter most sincerely. Is the little Arbell come back with them?"

"Yea, madam."

"And is she installed in my former rooms, with the canopy over her cradle to befit her strain of royalty?"

"I think not, madam. Meseems that my Lady Countess hath seen reason to be heedful on that score. My young lady hath come back with a grave *gouvernante*, who makes her read her primer and sew her seam, and save that she sat next my Lady at the wedding feast there is little difference made between her and the other grandchildren."

The Queen then inquired into the circumstances of the wedding festivities with the interest of one to whom most of the parties were more or less known, and who seldom had the treat of a little feminine gossip. She asked who had been "her little Cis's

partner," and when she heard of Babington, she said, "Ah ha, then, the poor youth has made his peace with my Lord?"

"Certes, madam, he is regarded with high favour by both my Lord and my Lady," said Richard, heartily wishing himself rid of his host.

"I rejoice to hear it," said Mary; "I was afraid that his childish knight-errantry towards the captive dame had damaged the poor stripling's prospects for ever. He is our neighbour here, and I believe Sir Ralf regards him as somewhat perilous."

"Nay, madam, if my Lord of Shrewsbury be satisfied with him, so surely ought I to be," said Sir Ralf.

Nothing more of importance passed that night. The packet of accounts was handed over to Sir Andrew Melville, and the two gentlemen dismissed with gracious good-nights.

Richard Talbot was entirely trusted, and when the next morning after prayers, breakfast, and a turn among the stables, it was intimated that the Queen was ready to see him anent my Lord's business, Sir Ralf Sadler, who had his week's report to write to the Council, requested that his presence might be dispensed with, and thus Mr. Talbot was ushered into the Queen's closet without any witnesses to their interview save Sir Andrew Melville and Marie de Courcelles. The Queen was seated in a large chair, leaning against cushions, and evidently in a good deal of pain, but, as Richard made his obeisance, her eyes shone as she quoted two lines from an old Scotch ballad—

> "'Madame, how does my gay goss hawk?
> Madame, how does my doo?'

Now can I hear what I hunger for!"

"My gay gosshawk, madam, is flown to join Sir Francis Drake at Plymouth, and taken his little brother with him. I come now from speeding them as far as Derby."

"Ah! you must not ask me to pray for success to them, my good sir,—only that there may be a time when nations may be no more divided, and I fear me we shall not live to see it. And my doo—my little Cis, did she weep as became a sister for the bold laddies?"

"She wept many tears, madam, but we are sore perplexed by a matter that I must lay before your Grace. My Lady Countess is hotly bent on a match between the maiden and young Babington."

"Babington!" exclaimed the Queen, with the lioness sparkle in her eye. "You refused the fellow of course?"

"Flatly, madam, but your Grace knows that it is ill making the Countess accept a denial of her will."

Mary laughed "Ah ha! methought, sir, you looked somewhat as if you had had a recent taste of my Lord of Shrewsbury's dove. But you are a man to hold your own sturdy will, Master Richard, let Lord or Lady say what they choose."

"I trust so, madam, I am master of mine own house, and, as I should certainly not give mine own daughter to Babington, so shall I guard your Grace's."

"You would not give the child to him if she were your own?"

"No, madam."

"And wherefore not? Because he is too much inclined to the poor prisoner and her faith? Is it so, sir?"

"Your Grace speaks the truth in part," said Richard,

and then with effort added, "and likewise, madam, with your pardon, I would say that though I verily believe it is nobleness of heart and spirit that inclines poor Antony to espouse your Grace's cause, there is to my mind a shallowness and indiscretion about his nature, even when most in earnest, such as would make me loath to commit any woman, or any secret, to his charge."

"You are an honest man, Mr. Talbot," said Mary; "I am glad my poor maid is in your charge. Tell me, is this suit on his part made to your daughter or to the Scottish orphan?"

"To the Scottish orphan, madam. Thus much he knows, though by what means I cannot tell, unless it be through that kinsman of mine, who, as I told your Grace, saw the babe the night I brought her in."

"Doubtless," responded Mary. "Take care he neither knows more, nor hints what he doth know to the Countess."

"So far as I can, I will, madam," said Richard, "but his tongue is not easy to silence; I marvel that he hath not let the secret ooze out already."

"Proving him to have more discretion than you gave him credit for, my good sir," said the Queen, smiling. "Refuse him, however, staunchly, grounding your refusal, if it so please you, on the very causes for which I should accept him, were the lassie verily what he deems her, my ward and kinswoman. Nor do you accede to him, whatever word or token he may declare that he brings from me, unless it bear this mark," and she hastily traced a peculiar-twisted form of M. "You know it?" she asked.

"I have seen it, madam," said Richard, gravely,

for he knew it as the letter which had been traced on the child's shoulders.

"Ah, good Master Richard," she said, with a sweet and wistful expression, looking up to his face in pleading, and changing to the familiar pronoun, "thou likest not my charge, and I know that it is hard on an upright man like thee to have all this dissembling thrust on thee, but what can a poor captive mother do but strive to save her child from an unworthy lot, or from captivity like her own? I ask thee to say nought, that is all, and to shelter the maid, who hath been as thine own daughter, yet a little longer. Thou wilt not deny me, for her sake."

"Madam, I deny nothing that a Christian man and my Queen's faithful servant may in honour do. Your Grace has the right to choose your own daughter's lot, and with her I will deal as you direct me. But, madam, were it not well to bethink yourself whether it be not a perilous and a cruel policy to hold out a bait to nourish hope in order to bind to your service a foolish though a generous youth, whose devotion may, after all, work you and himself more ill than good?"

Mary looked a good deal struck, and waved back her two attendants, who were both startled and offended at what Marie de Courcelles described as the Englishman's brutal boldness.

"Silence, dear friends," said she. "Would that I had always had counsellors who would deal with me with such honour and disinterestedness. Then should I not be here."

However, she then turned her attention to the accounts, where Sir Andrew Melville was ready to question and debate every item set down by Shrewsbury's steward; while his mistress showed herself

liberal and open-handed. Indeed she had considerable command of money from her French dowry, the proceeds of which were, in spite of the troubles of the League, regularly paid to her, and no doubt served her well in maintaining the correspondence which, throughout her captivity, eluded the vigilance of her keepers. On taking leave of her, which Richard Talbot did before joining his host at the mid-day meal, she reiterated her thanks for his care of her daughter, and her charges to let no persuasion induce him to consent to Babington's overtures, adding that she hoped soon to obtain permission to have the maiden amongst her authorised attendants. She gave him a billet, loosely tied with black floss silk and unsealed, so that if needful, Sadler and Shrewsbury might both inspect the tender, playful, messages she wrote to her "*mignonne*," and which she took care should not outrun those which she had often addressed to Bessie Pierrepoint.

Cicely was a little disappointed when she first opened the letter, but ere long she bethought herself of the directions she had received to hold such notes to the fire, and accordingly she watched, waiting even till the next day before she could have free and solitary access to either of the two fires in the house, those in the hall and in the kitchen.

At last, while the master was out farming, Ned at school, and the mistress and all her maids engaged in the unsavoury occupation of making candles, by repeated dipping of rushes into a caldron of melted fat, after the winter's salting, she escaped under pretext of attending to the hall fire, and kneeling beside the glowing embers, she held the paper over it, and soon saw pale yellow characters appear and deepen into a sort of brown or green, in which she read, "My little jewel

must share the ring with none less precious. Yet be not amazed if commendations as from me be brought thee. Jewels are sometimes useful to dazzle the eyes of those who shall never possess them. Therefore seem not cold nor over coy, so as to take away all hope. It may be much for my service. Thou art discreet, and thy good guardians will hinder all from going too far. It might be well that he should deem thee and me inclined to what *they* oppose. Be secret. Keep thine own counsel, and let them not even guess what thou hast here read. So fare thee well, with my longing, yearning blessing."

Cicely hastily hid the letter in the large housewifely pocket attached to her girdle, feeling excited and important at having a real secret unguessed by any one, and yet experiencing some of the reluctance natural to the pupil of Susan Talbot at the notion of acting a part towards Babington. She really liked him, and her heart warmed to him as a true friend of her much-injured mother, so that it seemed the more cruel to delude him with false hopes. Yet here was she asked to do a real service to her mother!

Poor Cis, she knelt gazing perplexed into the embers, now and then touching a stick to make them glow, till Nat, the chief of "the old blue bottles of servingmen," came in to lay the cloth for dinner, exclaiming, "So, Mistress Cis! Madam doth cocker thee truly, letting thee dream over the coals, till thy face be as red as my Lady's new farthingale, while she is toiling away like a very scullion."

CHAPTER XXI.

A TANGLE.

It was a rainy November afternoon. Dinner was over, the great wood fire had been made up, and Mistress Talbot was presiding over the womenfolk of her household and their tasks with needle and distaff. She had laid hands on her unwilling son Edward to show his father how well he could read the *pièce de resistance* of the family, Fabyan's Chronicle; and the boy, with an elbow firmly planted on either side of the great folio, was floundering through the miseries of King Stephen's time; while Mr. Talbot, after smoothing the head of his largest hound for some minutes, had leant back in his chair and dropped asleep. Cicely's hand tardily drew out her thread, her spindle scarcely balanced itself on the floor, and her maiden meditation was in an inactive sort of way occupied with the sense of dulness after the summer excitements, and wonder whether her greatness were all a dream, and anything would happen to recall her once more to be a princess. The kitten at her feet took the spindle for a lazily moving creature, and thought herself fascinating it, so she stared hard, with only an occasional whisk of the end of her striped tail; and Mistress Susan was only kept awake by her anxiety to adapt Diccon's last year's jerkin to Ned's use.

Suddenly the dogs outside bayed, the dogs inside pricked their ears, Ned joyfully halted, his father uttered the unconscious falsehood, "I'm not asleep, lad, go on," then woke up as horses' feet were heard; Ned dashed out into the porch, and was in time to hold the horse of one of the two gentlemen, who, with cloaks over their heads, had ridden up to the door. He helped them off with their cloaks in the porch, exchanging greetings with William Cavendish and Antony Babington.

"Will Mrs. Talbot pardon our riding-boots?" said the former. "We have only come down from the Manor-house, and we rode mostly on the grass."

Their excuses were accepted, though Susan had rather Master William had brought any other companion. However, on such an afternoon, almost any variety was welcome, especially to the younger folk, and room was made for them in the circle, and according to the hospitality of the time, a cup of canary fetched for each to warm him after the ride, while another was brought to the master of the house to pledge them in—a relic of the barbarous ages, when such a security was needed that the beverage was not poisoned.

Will Cavendish then explained that a post had come that morning to his stepfather from Wingfield, having been joined on the way by Babington (people always preferred travelling in companies for security's sake), and that, as there was a packet from Sir Ralf Sadler for Master Richard, he had brought it down, accompanied by his friend, who was anxious to pay his *devoirs* to the ladies, and though Will spoke to the mother, he smiled and nodded comprehension at the daughter, who blushed furiously, and set her spindle to twirl and leap so violently, as to make the kitten

believe the creature had taken fright, and was going to escape. On she dashed with a sudden spring, involving herself and it in the flax. The old watch-dog roused himself with a growl to keep order, Cicely flung herself on the cat, Antony hurried to the rescue to help her disentangle it, and received a fierce scratch for his pains, which made him start back, while Mrs. Talbot put in her word. "Ah, Master Babington, it is ill meddling with a cat in the toils, specially for men folk! Here, Cis, hold her fast and I will soon have her free. Still, Tib!

Cicely's cheeks were of a still deeper colour as she held fast the mischievous favourite, while the good mother untwisted the flax from its little claws and supple limbs, while it winked, twisted its head about sentimentally, purred, and altogether wore an air of injured innocence and forgiveness.

"I am afraid, sir, you receive nothing but damage at our house," said Mrs. Talbot politely. "Hast drawn blood? Oh fie! thou ill-mannered Tib! Will you have a tuft from a beaver to stop the blood?"

"Thanks, madam, no, it is a small scratch. I would, I would that I could face truer perils for this lady's sake!"

"That I hope you will not, sir," said Richard, in a serious tone, which conveyed a meaning to the ears of the initiated, though Will Cavendish only laughed, and said,

"Our kinsman takes it gravely! It was in the days of our grandfathers that ladies could throw a glove among the lions, and bid a knight fetch it out for her love."

"It has not needed a lion to defeat Mr. Babington," observed Ned, looking up from his book with a sober

twinkle in his eye, which set them all laughing, though his father declared that he ought to have his ears boxed for a malapert varlet.

Will Cavendish declared that the least the fair damsel could do for her knight-errant was to bind up his wounds, but Cis was too shy to show any disposition so to do, and it was Mrs. Talbot who salved the scratch for him. She had a feeling for the motherless youth, upon whom she foreboded that a fatal game might be played.

When quiet was restored, Mr. Talbot craved license from his guests, and opened the packet. There was a letter for Mistress Cicely Talbot in Queen Mary's well-known beautiful hand, which Antony followed with eager eyes, and a low gasp of "Ah! favoured maiden," making the good mother, who overheard it, say to herself, "Methinks his love is chiefly for the maid as something appertaining to the Queen, though he wots not how nearly. His heart is most for the Queen herself, poor lad."

The maiden did not show any great haste to open the letter, being aware that the true *gist* of it could only be discovered in private, and her father was studying his own likewise in silence. It was from Sir Ralf Sadler to request that Mistress Cicely might be permitted to become a regular member of the household. There was now a vacancy since, though Mrs. Curll was nearly as much about the Queen as ever, it was as the secretary's wife, not as one of the maiden attendants; and Sir Ralf wrote that he wished the more to profit by the opportunity, as he might soon be displaced by some one not of a temper greatly to consider the prisoner's wishes. Moreover, he said the poor lady was ill at ease, and much dejected at the tenor of

her late letters from Scotland, and that she had said repeatedly that nothing would do her good but the presence of her pretty playfellow. Sir Ralf added assurances that he would watch over the maiden like his own daughter, and would take the utmost care of the faith and good order of all within his household. Curll also wrote by order of his mistress a formal application for the young lady, to which Mary had added in her own hand, "I thank the good Master Richard and Mrs. Susan beforehand, for I know they will not deny me."

Refusal was, of course, impossible to a mother who had every right to claim her own child; and there was nothing to be done but to fix the time for setting off: and Cicely, who had by this time read her own letter, or at least all that was on the surface, looked up tremulous, with a strange frightened gladness, and said, "Mother, she needs me."

"I shall shortly be returning home," said Antony, "and shall much rejoice if I may be one of the party who will escort this fair maiden."

"I shall take my daughter myself on a pillion, sir," said Richard, shortly.

"Then, sir, I may tell my Lord that you purpose to grant this request," said Will Cavendish, who had expected at least some time to be asked for deliberation, and knew his mother would expect her permission to be requested.

"I may not choose but do so," replied Richard; and then, thinking he might have said too much, he added, "It were sheer cruelty to deny any solace to the poor lady."

"Sick and in prison, and balked by her only son," added Susan, "one's heart cannot but ache for her."

"Let not Mr. Secretary Walsingham hear you say so, good madam," said Cavendish, smiling. In London they think of her solely as a kind of malicious fury shut up in a cage, and there were those who looked askance at me when I declared that she was a gentlewoman of great sweetness and kindness of demeanour. I believe myself they will not rest till they have her blood!"

Cis and Susan cried out with horror, and Babington with stammering wrath demanded whether she was to be assassinated in the Spanish fashion, or on what pretext a charge could be brought against her. "Well," Cavendish answered, "as the saying is, give her rope enough, and she will hang herself." Indeed, there's no doubt but that she tampered enough with Throckmorton's plot to have been convicted of misprision of treason, and so she would have been, but that her most sacred Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, would have no charge made against her.

"Treason from one sovereign to another, that is new law!" said Babington.

"So to speak," said Richard; "but if she claim to be heiress to the crown, she must also be a subject. Heaven forefend that she should come to the throne!"

To which all except Cis and Babington uttered a hearty amen, while a picture arose before the girl of herself standing beside her royal mother robed in velvet and ermine on the throne, and of the faces of Lady Shrewsbury and her daughter as they recognised her, and were pardoned.

Cavendish presently took his leave, and carried the unwilling Babington off with him, rightly divining that the family would wish to make their arrangements alone. To Richard's relief, Babington had brought

him no private message, and to Cicely's disappointment, there was no addition in sympathetic ink to her letter, though she scorched the paper brown in trying to bring one out. The Scottish Queen was much too wary to waste and risk her secret expedients without necessity.

To Richard and Susan this was the real resignation of their foster-child into the hands of her own parent. It was true that she would still bear their name, and pass for their daughter, but that would be only so long as it might suit her mother's convenience; and instead of seeing her every day, and enjoying her full confidence (so far as they knew), she would be out of reach, and given up to influences, both moral and religious, which they deeply distrusted; also to a fate looming in the future with all the dark uncertainty that brooded over all connected with Tudor or Stewart royalty.

How much good Susan wept and prayed that night, only her pillow knew, not even her husband; and there was no particular comfort when my Lady Countess descended on her in the first interval of fine weather, full of wrath at not having been consulted, and discharging it in all sorts of predictions as to Cis's future. No honest and loyal husband would have her, after being turned loose in such company; she would be corrupted in morals and manners, and a disgrace to the Talbots; she would be perverted in faith, become a Papist, and die in a nunnery beyond sea; or she would be led into plots and have her head cut off; or pressed to death by the *peine forte et dure*.

Susan had nothing to say to all this, but that her husband thought it right, and then had a little vigorous advice on her own score against tamely submitting

to any man, a weakness which certainly could not be laid to the charge of the termagant of Hardwicke.

Cicely herself was glad to go. She loved her mother with a romantic enthusiastic affection, missed her engaging caresses, and felt her Bridgefield home eminently dull, flat, and even severe, especially since she had lost the excitement of Humfrey's presence, and likewise her companion Diccon. So she made her preparations with a joyful alacrity, which secretly pained her good foster-parents, and made Susan almost ready to reproach her with ingratitude.

They lectured her, after the fashion of the time, on the need of never forgetting her duty to her God in her affection to her mother, Susan trusting that she would never let herself be led away to the Romish faith, and Richard warning her strongly against untruth and falsehood, though she must be exposed to cruel perplexities as to the right—"But if thou be true to man, thou wilt be true to God," he said. "If thou be false to man, thou wilt soon be false to thy God likewise."

"We will pray for thee, child," said Susan. "Do thou pray earnestly for thyself that thou mayest ever see the right."

"My queen mother is a right pious woman. She is ever praying and reading holy books," said Cis. "Mother Susan, I marvel you, who know her, can speak thus."

"Nay, child, I would not lessen thy love and duty to her, poor soul, but it is not even piety in a mother that can keep a maiden from temptation. I blame not her in warning thee."

Richard himself escorted the damsel to her new home. There was no preventing their being joined by

Babington, who, being well acquainted with the road, and being also known as a gentleman of good estate, was able to do much to make their journey easy to them, and secure good accommodation for them at the inns, though Mr. Talbot entirely baffled his attempts to make them his guests, and insisted on bearing a full share of the reckoning. Neither did Cicely fulfil her mother's commission to show herself inclined to accept his attentions. If she had been under contrary orders, there would have been some excitement in going as far as she durst, but the only effect on her was embarrassment, and she treated Antony with the same shy stiffness she had shown to Humfrey, during the earlier part of his residence at home. Besides, she clung more and more to her adopted father, who, now that they were away from home and he was about to part with her, treated her with a tender, chivalrous deference, most winning in itself, and making her feel herself no longer a child.

Arriving at last at Wingfield, Sir Ralf Sadler had hardly greeted them before a messenger was sent to summon the young lady to the presence of the Queen of Scots. Her welcome amounted to ecstasy. The Queen rose from her cushioned invalid chair as the bright young face appeared at the door, held out her arms, gathered her into them, and, covering her with kisses, called her by all sorts of tender names in French and Scottish.

"O *ma mie*, my lassie, *ma fille*, mine ain wee thing, how sweet to have one bairn who is mine, mine ain, whom they have not robbed me of, for thy brother, ah, thy brother, he hath forsaken me! He is made of the false Darnley stuff, and compacted by Knox and Buchanan and the rest, and he will not stand a blast

of Queen Elizabeth's wrath for the poor mother that bore him. Ay, he hath betrayed me, and deluded me, my child; he hath sold me once more to the English loons! I am set faster in prison than ever, the iron entereth into my soul. Thou art but daughter to a captive queen, who looks to thee to be her one bairn, one comfort and solace."

Cicely responded by caresses, and indeed felt herself more than ever before the actual daughter, as she heard with indignation of James's desertion of his mother's cause; but Mary, whatever she said herself, would not brook to hear her speak severely of him. "The poor laddie," she said, "he was no better than a prisoner among those dour Scots lords," and she described in graphic terms some of her own experiences of royalty in Scotland.

The other ladies all welcomed the new-comer as the best medicine both to the spirit and body of their Queen. She was regularly enrolled among the Queen's maidens, and shared their meals. Mary dined and supped alone, sixteen dishes being served to her, both on "fish and flesh days," and the reversion of these as well as a provision of their own came to the higher table of her attendants, where Cicely ranked with the two Maries, Jean Kennedy, and Sir Andrew Melville. There was a second table, at which ate the two secretaries, Mrs. Curll, and Elizabeth Curll, Gilbert's sister, a most faithful attendant on the Queen. As before, she shared the Queen's chamber, and there it was that Mary asked her, "Well, *mignonne*, and how fares it with thine ardent suitor? Didst say that he rode with thee?"

"As far as the Manor gates, madam."

"And what said he? Was he very pressing?"

"Nay, madam, I was ever with my father—Mr. Talbot."

"And he keeps the poor youth at arm's length. Thine other swain, the sailor, his son, is gone off once more to rob the Spaniards, is he not?—so there is the more open field."

"Ay! but not till he had taught Antony a lesson."

The Queen made Cis tell the story of the encounter, at which she was much amused. "So my princess, even unknown, can make hearts beat and swords ring for her. Well done! thou art worthy to be one of the maids in Perceforest or Amadis de Gaul, who are bred in obscurity, and set all the knights a sparring together. Tourneys are gone out since my poor gude-father perished by mischance at one, or we would set thee aloft to be contended for."

"O madame *mère*, it made me greatly afraid, and poor Humfrey had to go off without leave-taking, my Lady Countess was so wrathful."

"So my Lady Countess is playing our game, is she! Backing Babington and banishing Talbot? Ha, ha," and Mary again laughed with a merriment that rejoiced the faithful ears of Jean Kennedy, under her bedclothes, but somewhat vexed Cicely. "Indeed, madam mother," she said, "if I must wed under my degree, I had rather it were Humfrey than Antony Babington."

"I tell thee, simple child, thou shalt wed neither. A woman does not wed every man to whom she gives a smile and a nod. So long as thou bear'st the name of this Talbot, he is a good watch-dog to hinder Babington from winning thee: but if my Lady Countess choose to send the swain here, favoured by her to pay his court to thee, why then, she gives us the best chance we have had for many a long day of holding

intercourse with our friends without, and a hope of thee will bind him the more closely."

"He is all yours, heart and soul, already, madam."

"I know it, child, but men are men, and no chains are so strong as can be forged by a lady's lip and eye, if she do it cunningly. So said my *belle mère* in France, and well do I believe it. Why, if one of the sour-visaged reformers who haunt this place chanced to have a daughter with sweetness enough to temper the acidity, the youth might be throwing up his cap the next hour for Queen Bess and the Reformation, unless we can tie him down with a silken cable while he is in the mind."

"Yea, madam, you who are beautiful and winsome, you can do such things, I am homely and awkward."

"*Mort de ma vie*, child! the beauty of the best of us is in the man's eyes who looks at us. 'Tis true, thou hast more of the Border lassie than the princess. The likeness of some ewe-milking, cheese-making sonsie Hepburn hath descended to thee, and hath been fostered by country breeding. But thou hast by nature the turn of the neck, and the tread that belong to our Lorraine blood, the blood of Charlemagne, and now that I have thee altogether, see if I train thee not so as to bring out the princess that is in thee; and so, good-night, my bairnie, my sweet child; I shall sleep to-night, now that I have thy warm fresh young cheek beside mine. Thou art life to me, my little one."

CHAPTER XXII.

TUTBURY.

James VI. again cruelly tore his mother's heart and dashed her hopes by an unfeeling letter, in which he declared her incapable of being treated with, since she was a prisoner and deposed. The not unreasonable expectation, that his manhood might reverse the proceedings wrought in his name in his infancy, was frustrated. Mary could no longer believe that he was constrained by a faction, but perceived clearly that he merely considered her as a rival, whose liberation would endanger his throne, and that whatever scruples he might once have entertained had given way to English gold and Scottish intimidation.

"The more simple was I to look for any other in the son of Darnley and the pupil of Buchanan," said she, "but a mother's heart is slow to give up her trust."

"And is there now no hope?" asked Cicely.

"Hope, child? *Dum spiro, spero.* The hope of coming forth honourably to him and to Elizabeth is at an end. There is another mode of coming forth," she added with a glittering eye, "a mode which shall make them rue that they have driven patience to extremity."

"By force of arms? Oh, madam!" cried Cicely.

"And wherefore not? My noble kinsman, Guise, is the paramount ruler in France, and will soon have crushed the heretics there; Parma is triumphant in the Low Countries, and has only to tread out the last remnants of faction with his iron boot. They wait only the call, which my motherly weakness has delayed, to bring their hosts to avenge my wrongs, and restore this island to the true faith. Then thou, child, wilt be my heiress. We will give thee to one who will worthily bear the sceptre, and make thee blessed at home. The Austrians make good husbands, I am told. Matthias or Albert would be a noble mate for thee; only thou must be trained to more princely bearing, my little home-bred lassie."

In spite—nay, perhaps, in consequence—of these anticipations, an entire change began for Cicely. It was as if all the romance of her princely station had died out and the reality had set in. Her freedom was at an end. As one of the suite of the Queen of Scots, she was as much a prisoner as the rest; whereas before, both at Buxton and Sheffield, she had been like a dog or kitten admitted to be petted and played with, but living another life elsewhere, while now there was nothing to relieve the weariness and monotony of the restraint.

Nor was the petting what it was at first. Mary was far from being in the almost frolicsome mood which had possessed her at Buxton; her hopes and spirits had sunk to the lowest pitch, and though she had an admirably sweet and considerate temper, and was scarcely ever fretful or unreasonable with her attendants, still depression, illness, and anxiety could not but tell on her mode of dealing with her surroundings. Sometimes she gave way entirely, and declared she

should waste away and perish in her captivity, and that she only brought misery and destruction on all who tried to befriend her; or, again, that she knew that Burghley and Walsingham were determined to have her blood.

It was in these moments that Cicely loved her most warmly, for caresses and endearments soothed her, and the grateful affection which received them would be very sweet. Or in a higher tone, she would trust that, if she were to perish, she might be a martyr and confessor for her Church, though, as she owned, the sacrifice would be stained by many a sin; and she betook herself to the devotions which then touched her daughter more than in any other respect.

More often, however, her indomitable spirit resorted to fresh schemes, and chafed fiercely and hotly at thought of her wrongs; and this made her the more critical of all that displeased her in Cicely.

Much that had been treated as charming and amusing when Cicely was her plaything and her visitor was now treated as unbecoming English rusticity. The Princess Bride must speak French and Italian, perhaps Latin; and the girl, whose literary education had stopped short when she ceased to attend Master Sniggius's school, was made to study her Cicero once more with the almoner, who was now a French priest named De Préaux, while Queen Mary herself heard her read French, and, though always good-natured, was excruciated by her pronunciation.

Moreover, Mary was too admirable a needlewoman not to wish to make her daughter the same; whereas Cicely's turn had always been for the department of housewifery, and she could make a castle in pastry far better than in tapestry; but where Queen Mary had

a whole service of cooks and pantlers of her own, this accomplishment was uncalled for, and was in fact considered undignified. She had to sit still and learn all the embroidery stitches and lace-making arts brought by Mary from the Court of France, till her eyes grew weary, her heart faint, and her young limbs ached for the freedom of Bridgefield Pleasaunce and Sheffield Park.

Her mother sometimes saw her weariness, and would try to enliven her by setting her to dance, but here poor Cicely's untaught movements were sure to incur reproof; and even if they had been far more satisfactory to the beholders, what refreshment were they in comparison with gathering cranberries in the park, or holding a basket for Ned in the apple-tree? Mrs. Kennedy made no scruple of scolding her roundly for fretting in a month over what the Queen had borne for full eighteen years.

"Ah!" said poor Cicely, "but she had always been a queen, and was used to being mewed up close!"

And if this was the case at Wingfield, how much more was it so at Tutbury, whither Mary was removed in January. The space was far smaller, and the rooms were cold and damp; there was much less outlet, the atmosphere was unwholesome, and the furniture insufficient. Mary was in bed with rheumatism almost from the time of her arrival, but she seemed thus to become the more vigilant over her daughter, and distressed by her shortcomings. If the Queen did not take exercise, the suite were not supposed to require any, and indeed it was never desired by her elder ladies, but to the country maiden it was absolute punishment to be thus shut up day after day. Neither Sir Ralf Sadler nor his colleague, Mr. Somer, had

brought a wife to share the charge, so that there was none of the neutral ground afforded by intercourse with the ladies of the Talbot family, and at first the only variety Cicely ever had was the attendance at chapel on the other side of the court.

It was remarkable that Mary discouraged all proselytising towards the Protestants of her train, and even forbore to make any open attempt on her daughter's faith. "*Celà viendrà,*" she said to Marie de Courcelles. "The sermons of M. le Pasteur will do more to convert her to our side than a hundred controversial arguments of our excellent Abbé; and when the good time comes, one High Mass will be enough to win her over."

"Alas! when shall we ever again assist at the Holy Sacrifice in all its glory!" sighed the lady.

"Ah, my good Courcelles! of what have you not deprived yourself for me! Sacrifice, ah! truly you share it! But for the child, it would give needless offence and difficulty were she to embrace our holy faith at present. She is simple and impetuous, and has not yet sufficiently outgrown the rude straightforward breeding of the good housewife, Madam Susan, not to rush into open confession of her faith, and then! oh the fracas! The wicked wolves would have stolen a precious lamb from M. le Pasteur's fold! Master Richard would be sent for! Our restraint would be the closer! Moreover, even when the moment of freedom strikes, who knows that to find her of their own religion may not win us favour with the English?"

So, from whatever motive, Cis remained unmolested in her religion, save by the weariness of the controversial sermons, during which the young lady contrived to abstract her mind pretty completely. If in

good spirits she would construct airy castles for her Archduke; if dispirited, she yearned with a homesick feeling for Bridgefield and Mrs. Talbot. There was something in the firm sober wisdom and steady kindness of that good lady which inspired a sense of confidence, for which no caresses nor brilliant auguries could compensate.

Weary and cramped she was to the point of having a feverish attack, and on one slightly delirious night she fretted piteously after "mother," and shook off the Queen's hand, entreating that "mother, real mother," would come. Mary was much pained, and declared that if the child were not better the next day she should have a messenger sent to summon Mrs. Talbot. However, she was better in the morning; and the Queen, who had been making strong representations of the unhealthiness and other inconveniences of Tutbury, received a promise that she should change her abode as soon as Chartley, a house belonging to the young Earl of Essex, could be prepared for her.

The giving away large alms had always been one of her great solaces—not that she was often permitted any personal contact with the poor: only to sit at a window watching them as they flocked into the court, to be relieved by her servants under supervision from some officer of her warders, so as to hinder any surreptitious communication from passing between them. Sometimes, however, the poor would accost her or her suite as she rode out; and she had a great compassion for them, deprived, as she said, of the alms of the religious houses, and flogged or branded if hunger forced them into beggary. On a fine spring day Sir Ralf Sadler invited the ladies out to a hawking party on the banks of the Dove, with the little sparrow hawks,

whose prey was specially larks. Pity for the beautiful soaring songster, or for the young ones that might be starved in their nests, if the parent birds were killed, had not then been thought of. A gallop on the moors, though they were strangely dull, gray, and stony, was always the best remedy for the Queen's ailments; and the party got into the saddle gaily, and joyously followed the chase, thinking only of the dexterity and beauty of the flight of pursuer and pursued, instead of the deadly terror and cruel death to which they condemned the crested creature, the very proverb for joyousness.

It was during the halt which followed the slaughter of one of the larks, and the reclaiming of the hawk, that Cicely strayed a little away from the rest of the party to gather some golden willow catkins and sprays of white sloe thorn wherewith to adorn a beaupot that might cheer the dull rooms at Tutbury.

She had jumped down from her pony for the purpose, and was culling the branch, when from the copsewood that clothed the gorge of the river a ragged woman, with a hood tied over her head, came forward with outstretched hand asking for alms.

"You may have something from the Queen anon, Goody, when I can get back to her," said Cis, not much liking the looks or the voice of the woman.

"And have you nothing to cross the poor woman's hand with, fair mistress?" returned the beggar. "She brought you fair fortune once; how know you but she can bring you more?"

And Cicely recognised the person who had haunted her at Sheffield, Tideswell, and Buxton, and whom she had heard pronounced to be no woman at all.

"I need no fortune of your bringing," she said

proudly, and trying to get nearer the rest of the party, heartily wishing she was on, not off, her little rough pony.

"My young lady is proud," said her tormentor, fixing on her the little pale eyes she so much disliked. "She is not one of the maidens who would thank one who can make or mar her life, and cast spells that can help her to a princely husband or leave her to a prison."

"Let go," said Cicely, as she saw a retaining hand laid on her pony's bridle; "I will not be beset thus."

"And this is your gratitude to her who helped you to lie in a queen's bosom; ay, and who could aid you to rise higher or fall lower?"

"I owe nothing to you," said Cicely, too angry to think of prudence. "Let me go!"

There was a laugh, and not a woman's laugh. "You owe nothing, quoth my mistress? Not to one who saw you, a drenched babe, brought in from the wreck, and who gave the sign which has raised you to your present honours? Beware!"

By this time, however, the conversation had attracted notice, and several riders were coming towards them.

There was an immediate change of voice from the threatening tone to the beggar's whine; but the words were—"I must have my reward ere I speak out."

"What is this? A masterful beggar wife besetting Mistress Talbot," said Mr. Somer, who came first.

"I had naught to give her," said Cicely.

"She should have the lash for thus frightening you," said Somer. "Yonder lady is too good to such vagabonds, and they come about us in swarms. Stand back, woman, or it may be the worse for you. Let me help you to your horse, Mistress Cicely."

Instead of obeying, the seeming woman, to gain time perhaps, began a story of woe; and Mr. Somer, being anxious to remount the young lady, did not immediately stop it, so that before Cis was in her saddle the Queen had ridden up, with Sir Ralf Sadler a little behind her. There were thus a few seconds free, in which the stranger sprang to the Queen's bridle and said a few hasty words almost inaudibly, and as Cis thought, in French; but they were answered aloud in English—"My good woman, I know all that you can tell me, and more, of this young lady's fortune. Here are such alms as are mine to give; but hold your peace, and quit us now."

Sir Ralf Sadler and his son-in-law both looked suspicious at this interview, and bade one of the grooms ride after the woman and see what became of her, but the fellow soon lost sight of her in the broken ground by the river-side.

When the party reached home, there was an anxious consultation of the inner circle of confidantes over Cicely's story. Neither she nor the Queen had the least doubt that the stranger was Cuthbert Langston, who had been employed as an agent of hers for many years past; his insignificant stature and colourless features eminently fitting him for it. No concealment was made now that he was the messenger with the beads and bracelets, which were explained to refer to some ivory beads which had been once placed among some spars purchased by the Queen, and which Jean had recognised as part of a rosary belonging to poor Alison Hepburn, the nurse who had carried the babe from Lochleven. This had opened the way to the recovery of her daughter. Mary and Sir Andrew Melville had always held him to be devotedly faithful,

but there had certainly been something of greed, and something of menace in his language which excited anxiety. Cicely was sure that his expressions conveyed that he really knew her royal birth, and meant to threaten her with the consequences, but the few who had known it were absolutely persuaded that this was impossible, and believed that he could only surmise that she was of more importance than an archer's daughter.

He had told the Queen in French that he was in great need, and expected a reward for his discretion respecting what he had brought her. And when he perceived the danger of being overheard, he had changed it into a pleading, "I did but tell the fair young lady that I could cast a spell that would bring her some good fortune. Would her Grace hear it?"

"So," said Mary, "I could but answer him as I did, Sadler and Somer being both nigh. I gave him my purse, with all there was therein. How much was it, Andrew?"

"Five golden pieces, besides groats and testers, madam," replied Sir Andrew.

"If he come again, he must have more, if it can be contrived without suspicion," said the Queen. "I fear me he may become troublesome if he guess somewhat, and have to be paid to hold his tongue."

"I dread worse than that," said Melville, apart to Jean Kennedy; "there was a scunner in his een that I mislikit, as though her Grace had offended him. And if the lust of the penny-fee hath possessed him, 'tis but who can bid the highest, to have him fast body and soul. Those lads! those lads! I've seen a mony of them. They'll begin for pure love of the Queen and of Holy Church, but ye see, 'tis lying and

falsehood and disguise that is needed, and one way or other they get so in love with it, that they come at last to lie to us as well as to the other side, and then none kens where to have them! Cuthbert has been over to that weary Paris, and once a man goes there, he leaves his truth and honour behind him, and ye kenna whether he be serving you, or Queen Elizabeth, or the deil himsel'. I wish I could stop that loon's thrapple, or else wot how much he kens anent our Lady Bride."

END OF VOL. I.

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